

Femme Fatales

Contents

VOLUME 9 NUMBER 1

The Luscious Ladies of Horror, Fantasy & Science Fiction

JUNE 30, 2006

Baltimore's initial installment of the annual Festival of Dangerous Concocts debuted on the March 4-5th weekend. And it was a fiasco. The operative buzz was "goth." But it was actually an alliance of femme fatales, including gorgeous cover women Denise Duff (§ 2) and Brinke Stevens (§ 1 & § 4). Jamie Donahue (§ 10), star of *DEAD HATE THE LIVING*—a sleeper hit, tallying an unprecedented volume of sales—turned out to be an auteur: she's co-writing her next novel.

Jenny Hsu and I sat with one of the guests, our very good friend Stuart Gordon, at the Charles Theatre for a screening of his *PIT AND THE PENDULUM*. At the film's conclusion, Stuart shifted into the q&a mode, recouping stories about *PIT* (my fave was an anecdote about the late Oliver Reed's chronic embolism) and his other films (*RE-ANIMATOR*, *FROM BEYOND*, *DOLLS*, et al.). All of the guests convened at Bertha's Dining Room for dinner. The food, alcohol and conversation were equally interesting. Brinke lavished praise upon Jenny for influencing the reform of yours truly (abstention from cigarettes, more reading/reposts, et al. I look better, I feel better, I'm Spartacus). Stuart seemed smitten when he disclosed that the new *anthropomorph* does not acknowledge Laurel and Hardy as comic icons: the homage is reserved, instead, for *The Three Stooges* (this is good: a scenario for any world annihilation). Later in the evening, Stuart, Denise, Jenny and I cruised to the Block (Baltimore's burlesque district).

The following day was a blast. Stuart, Jenny, actress Jonathan Fuller (*CASTLE FREAK*) and George Stover and myself visited the grave of Edgar Allan Poe. The conversion site was Bohemian, an indoor labyrinth of bars and tropical shelters. Panels, moderated by director Kevin Summerville and yours truly, breached filmmaking and women's roles in the genre (Denise's *SUBSPECIES* heroine has cracked the male dominion). Congratulations to C'mere and Shoshana Pignani, and Amber Thurman & Co., for a *luminous* pageant. Tag into www.Anthropomorph.com for news on the next Festival.

Bill George



Page 4



Page 18



Page 24



Page 38



Page 48

4 A NEW VAMPI IS ELVIRA FEELIN' THE HEAT?

She's got ink in her blood. Countess Vladimira is turning herself into a franchise: a comic book, stage act... / Article by Dan Scapperotti

8 BUFFY: SARAH MICHELLE GELLAR

The actress reflects upon Buffy's future, the prom episode, her script input & summer vacation. / Article by Edward Gross

12 BUFFY: WRITER/PRODUCER MARTI NOXON

Promoted to the series' supervising producer, Noxon raps about teen angst, sex, the dark side, censors. / Article by Mitch Parsons

16 BUFFY: CHARISMA CARPENTER

Her insight on Cordelia's evolution, the transplantation to ANGEL, film roles & favorite BUFFY episodes. / Article by Mitch Parsons

20 BUFFY ('92): KRISTY SWANSON

Recalling her 1992 role as the original Buffy, this GRAPEVINE star compares the movie to the TV spin-off. / Article by Mitch Parsons

22 BUFFY: KRISTINE SUTHERLAND

She identifies with Buffy's mom: so how does Sutherland deal with vampires and psycho robot boyfriends? / Article by Mitch Parsons

24 BUFFY: ELIZA DUSHKU

Recalling the birth of Faith & a provocative episode, she admits "staying with BUFFY is not what I want to do." / Article by Mitch Parsons

28 THE BOOKS OF BUFFY

Les femmes are literally writing the books on Buffy: will their work apply a fresh slant to horror fiction? / Article by Denise Dumas

33 BUFFY: SOPHIA CRAWFORD SLAYS 'EM

A stunt woman with badass literally turned-up with *BUFFY*, the action star notes her career heated-up in Hong Kong. / Article by Craig Reid

40 DANA HEE: STUNTS, SEX APPEAL & VAMPS

A beautiful body double's odyssey: an Olympic medal, the Playboy controversy, *SPECIES* SI & Nicole Kidman. / Article by Laura Schiff

48 ALINA THOMPSON: HOLLYWOOD VOYEUR

The siren of sexy psychological thrillers, formerly resistant to nudity in movies, yields to a hot spot in cyberspace. / Article by Marc Shapiro

54 RENA MERO: HOTTE FROM OUTER SPACE

She caught with Tie Camerel Abandoning the Sable pseudonym, Mero is a knockout as an action diva. / Article by Dan Scapperotti

5 FATAL ATTRACtIONS

62 LETTERS

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COUNTESS VLADIMIRA

**SHE'S GOT INK IN HER BLOOD!
WILL ELVIRA FEEL THE HEAT?**

BY DAN SCAPPEROTTI

Elvira look out! Countess Vladimira is somewhere in the wings. The Countess (a.k.a. Avery Misuraca) has been "into horror" since she was a tyke. Seven years ago, Misuraca was assigned to pose as Vampirella for Harris Comics. Realizing that big bucks weren't tagged to her involvement in the franchise, she decided to create her own femme fatale. "That way, I own all the rights to it," said Misuraca. "I came up with the character of Countess Vladimira, who is the daughter of Vlad the Im-

paler. Later, I found out that there are actually people in Slavic countries named Vladimira."

Donning the black cape and fangs, she posed for photos and a video tailored for the iconic Chiller Theater convention. While her initial reception was warm, the Countess took a two-year sabbatical. "I was dating Mr. Conservative, who said 'Why the hell are you doing this freaky gig?'" recalls Misuraca. "Since then, I've been doing films, B-movies. I did TERROR FIRMER with Truma last year. They were making it up as they went along. I did a Truma film once and that will be the last. I did a movie called EVIL EDGE which was a remake of HORROR HOTEL. I did a movie last summer with a company called Cinematech called VAMPIRE NIGHT, and I introduced Hammer Films on Cinemax."

"I was doing conventions and a publisher from Brainstorm, which just does vampire characters, asked me to do a book with them. I did two books and I really wasn't happy with them because he didn't give me a big enough budget for artista. It sold well, but I don't want to put out crap."

Conferring with the publisher of Peregrine Enter-



Avery Misuraca as Countess Vladimira. Along with introducing her comic book after age, the Countess is pitching coffee table cases (www.coffeetablecases.com).

tainment, Misuraca struck a deal for a three issue run. The first two issues of the Countess Vladimira: Blood Relations trilogy have debuted on newsstands.

"In the comic book, I actually play a borer personality," Misuraca explained. "I found over the years that I've always tried to hide myself from the world, but now that borer is so big I can come out as a borer personality and portray myself. In the comic book, vampires really don't live forever. They can live to be about a thousand years old like Vlad, but other vampires don't live that long. My rich and powerful father, Vlad, had a few wives and he's produced a few children, and he knows

that he is going to die soon. He wants his bloodline to live on. He's had some problems in the past trying to reproduce. He had me, my sister and brother, Baron, who's actually based on a real person in a band called Fairies. My father sets up with 13 or 14 clones before he dies. Because he's an evil guy, my job is to go and find them and kill them. I've got to save the world."

The publisher gives Misuraca relative autonomy. "I get to choose the writer and I chose the artist," she said. "I get the script before it goes to print and I say, 'Change this or that.' I'm not writing the book, but I come up with different stories or plot lines." □



ATTRACTI0NS

F A T A L E

BY DAN SCAPPEROTTI

• Congratulations to Sheeri Rappoport. The actress/FX staffer (9-12, 8-8, etc.) has been cast as a weekly regular on the *NYPD BLUE* television series (her character is "Officer Mary Franco"). Back in 1997, we lauded the actress as one of "Sci-Fi's 50 Sexiest Femmes," which prompted an audition with Ivan Reitman. Her photo spreads and writing style were equally enticing. We're very proud of you, Sheeri!

• Australia isn't generally known for its genre films but director Kimble Rendall's *CUT* has just been picked up by Trimark for U.S. distribution. The plot: back in 1906, production on a horror film was indefinitely postponed as the result of an on-set murder. Molly Ringwald plays an actress who is back 14 years later to resume her role and wrap-up the incomplete film.

• "Bong Queen" Alice Krige (ST: *FIRST CONTACT*), who played a spectral femme fatale in the unremade *GOHOST STORY*, has been cast in Richard Coogan's *THE CALLING*. A youthful mother's life is imperiled when she discovers that her offspring is the son of the devil. Laura Elena and Richard Lintern head the cast of the supernatural thriller.

• Everyone from A (pop singer Paula Abdul) to Z (Playmate Victoria Zdroj) is chronicled in *Glamour Girls* (The Illustrated Encyclopedia) (St. Martin's Press). "I always felt this entire genre of glamour girls had always been omitted," said editor Steve Sullivan. "Only the obvious stars, who had enduring film or TV careers, would up being significantly documented. For me, the realization of this entire category are the women who never quite achieved that level of stardom, but who are none the less quite fascinating personalities. The stories of these women needed to be told in a way that people could easily access. It's a culmination of what I've been collecting over the last 30 years."

"About half of the book's photo came directly from the women, which is one of the fun things about the book," continues Sullivan. "Particularly the Playmates and the other girls from the '60s and '70s, some of which have not been published before."

Among the hundreds of subcultures profiled for the book—including actresses, strippers and models—Sullivan is especially enthralled with "Cynthia Myers, *Playboy's* December 1968 Playmate. She's the one who has always been the most meaningful to me, just because she is such an extraordinary human being. To me, that's representative of a lot of women who I've been interested in on many levels beyond the visual."

"There are a couple who come to mind as unusual. Angelique, the Hollywood bikini star—that's all she does, poses for Hollywood bikini-beads. Kind of along the same lines, although in a somewhat different way, is Hajj of *Russ Meyer* fame. Angelique I've never quite figured out. I spent four hours with her and never had a sense of who she was as a human being. Basically, she



Hammer hottie Ingrid Pitt (l) and Gwyneth Paltrow are among the Top 400 "Glamour Girls" [p].

wants to project the image of a gal next door from the planet Venus. She doesn't want to be seen as flesh and blood. Hajj also doesn't like to emphasize her earthly origins, and comes from another universe to help mankind. With Angelique, one is never exactly sure what she believes: what she is saying, she's in a consciousness all her own. Hajj is firmly grounded in the world of reality she's just delightfully unusual and fun."

For more information write: GG Encyclopedia, P.O. Box 34501, Washington, D.C. 20043 or e-mail: steve@steves.com.

• "Bond girl" Téla Shad (LUCILLE TO KILL), who played the title role in *VAMPYRELLA*, has been cast in *ISLAND OF THE DEAD*. She plays a police woman who is stranded on an atoll with desperate convicts and a corrupt businessman. To make matters worse, they're attacked by a swarm

of supernatural foes.

• From the "It Can Come Back to Haunt You" Department, B-movie maestro Roger Corman has scheduled this year's debut of his 1962 film *FIRE ON THE AMAZON*. A famous environmentalist is murdered in the Amazon and a young woman and photojournalist team up to investigate the killing. Although the film was never released, its book value has soared as a result of a star, a then unknown Sandra Bullock. Originally stamped with an R rating, Corman has decided to retitle the "more graphic" love-making scene which has earned an NC-17.

• Debbie is getting married. Well, actually it's her alter ego whose planning to tie the knot. Rees O'Connor, who plays Xena's combunduous sidekick, announced her engagement to a long time boyfriend (New Zealander Steve Muir) through Xena Fan Club president Sharon Delaney.

• Jamie Donatucci, star of *THE DEAD HATE THE LIVING* (8-16), is topbilled in *THE JESTER* (aka *THE POOL OF RAVEN-CHEST*). Donatucci, who co-wrote the script with Michael Todd, describes the film as "a modern Grand Guignol thriller that opens in medieval times. A court jester abets a grisly murder and everything goes chaotic. Flash forward to the 21st century, where the jester is incarnated through a macabre painting." Actor Stephen Purst ("Flicker" in *ANIMAL HOUSE*, "Mr. Cotto" in *BABYLON FIVE*) is directing.

• *Wetlands* director Mark Becker describes the central characters of *GOTH* as "a coven of female vengeful who have transported themselves, from town to town, for thousands of years. Hanging out at a contemporary pool club, they meet their match with Hannah (GENERAL HOSPITAL's Stacey Bickell). A cat and mouse game begins." Cast also includes Larisa Oleynik and Denise Melling. Lee Jones (GRIZZLY) is producing.

• Special effects craftsman John Carl Buechler (FROM BEYOND, *CARNOASAUR* 3) applied his zoetrope to *BLOOD SURF*, a zoocopter about giant crocodiles that prefer to dine on bikini-clad models who are sunbathing in Coppergate. Buechler is currently prepping to direct *FOLKLORE* ("It's THE X-FILES Meets SCREAM").

• 20th Century-Fox Home Entertainment has released another six episodes of *BUFFY* on video; each focuses on the Buffy-Angel romance. Titles include "Surprise," "Innocence," "Passion," "I Only Have Eyes For You," and parts one and two of "Becoming." Series star women Sarah Michelle Gellar (page 32) and stunt coordinator Jeff Pruitt have been cast in a *BUFFY* interactive game that will debut on Halloween (an *ANGEL* spin-off game will be released in 2001). "I play many of the female vampires and men char-



612000
Glamour girls

acters in the game," said Crawford. "Jeff and I are performing all the moves, all the action, the lighting, the martial arts and the gymnastics. Anytime you see any of the characters moving...it's female, it's me. If it's male, it's Jeff. We're put on black, very form-fitting suits. And they put monitors on each of our joints and our smiles, knees, hips, elbows and around the head. When we stand in the center of a room, they have several cameras which pick up our movements, and they go into the computer and it comes up as a 3D figure. I don't know if they'll take Sarah Michelle Gellar's face and impose it onto our bodies or if they'll have a likeness of Sarah's face. Their intention is to make the characters look as lifelike as possible, as real as possible and as close to the actors as they can. They're going to be using new technology for this game. It will look like the most life-like game they've ever had."

•FF cover woman Stacy Rosman (7/14) has recently wrapped VERONICA 2000 ("A sexy sci-fi saga") and HOUSE TO SHARE ("I play the 'fantasy girl'"). Her next project is in Andy Sarris's movie Cover woman Brooke Stevens (7/1 & 8/4) is negotiating EMMANUELLE IN AMITYVILLE!

•FF readers are encouraged to tap into www.carte-carte-paris.com. Artist Carlos Cartagena's sultry renderings evoke a '50s pinup: think Verga 2000. "My ultimate goal is to paint female sensuality without yielding to full nudity," says Cartagena. "A woman can look more seductive in a bikini than in the buff. My work reflects the feminine wholeness and natural beauty, that I radiated the 1940's and 50's." The illustrator's models include Angela Almendras (page 7), Bonnie-Jill Laflin (6/12), and Linda O'Neill. We'll be profiling Mr. Cartagena sometime this summer; he'll be furnishing art, exclusively tailored for FF, of shapely sci-fi sirens.

•Molly Monders, who recently wrapped DINNER FOR TWO, stars in VAMPIRE OF NOTRE DAME for director Donald Farmer (COMPELLING EVIDENCE). "Our central characters, septic bloodsuckers played by Mandy and Tina Krause, are homage to director Jean Rollin (LIPS OF BLOOD)," says Farmer. Bill Hafner co-stars, Lucas Balbo co-produces.

•Roxanne Michaels is busier than ever since bidding adieu to on-screen doppelgängers. "My presence in saying 'Not so nuddy he paid off,'" said Michaels. "TITANIC 2000 was really the last of my great nude roles. I did it with Temmy Parks on a beat up old car. Tammy is such a sweetheart. She's so open. I got along with her very well. I thought if I'm going to be naked, I might as well be naked with a girl."

Her modeling career has soared. The occasional FF scribe (8/4) lands several assignments



Actress FF staffer Roxanne Michaels is embodying Lars Croft for comic book artist Joe Jusko. She's also teaming with Rachael Robbins for WILD NIGHTS!

a week for one of New York's leading romance novel agencies, posing for such artists as John Paul. Michaels was recently cast in DAWN OF TIME; she plays Dawn, a young woman who traverses through time to recover objects that are required in the present day world. Michaels has also landed up with reviving Rachael Robbins (7/13) for an HBO project. "We're shooting a spec called WILD NIGHTS," said Michaels. "It's going to be me, Rachael, and two other hot babes who wander around New York City checking out the night life. We shot every weekend in March and April. Rachael and I are like best buds and we're working together on a lot of things."

The fire-eating trick that Michaels occasionally brandishes seems to be paying dividends as well. She recently nailed a gig with national

recording artists Smeck, hosting them at their live concerts. Michaels was also tapped to be the latest in a string of models sitting in for Lars Croft. Comic book artist Joe Jusko invited Michaels to pose for two IDW/Raider covers.

The big news is that Michaels is finally going to the print. Graduating early from high school, the model-actress was denied the chance to attend her own prom; recently, one of her fans asked her to his senior dance. "I'm going to the prom," enthuses Michaels. "He asked me and I'm going. I called up Rachael and all my friends and they said, 'Do it!'" Kynets, her live-action, online comic book is up and running at www.gann.com. "We shoot with a digital camera and are putting in amazing 3D animation," she said. "We're going to be doing an episode once a month."

•Is it time for a resurgence of 3D movies? Well, maybe not but Mike Roush, who produced last year's HOT WAX ZOMBIES ON WHEELS, is planning to give it a try with his next film, NAKED FIRE POWER, described as action-oriented burlesque. Hey, it's a high concept for a non-exploitant budget! A Chinese Empress' spirit turns a trio of exotic dancers into martial arts superheroes. Yip.

"It's kind of like CHARLIE'S ANGELS meet Russ Meyer," said Roush. "We've got the first three girls lined up. One of them is Angel Almendras, a stunning Latina supermodel seductress."

Almendras recently visited John Buscemi's studio for a session with photographer Linda Tintori and some of Buscemi's fix props. "We posed with his monsters, like Jason from FRIDAY THE 13TH," laughed Almendras. "It was a Femme Fatale shoot with some other girls, including Leslie Harter and Stacy Rosman. I posed in the clothes of this very realistic squad, and it was very exciting. I was excited, but you're not really going to be able to see anything because of the way that the tentacles are positioned. Texas is just a little bit. We did bikinis and hands over boobs shots. Everything was as sexy as possible, we knew what guys like. It was really fun. John Buscemi has created so many fabulous things. It was really amazing. He's a great and talented guy."

The model also shot with FF's New York photographer Diana Polcov, who was on a field trip to California. The pair opted to travel north to Lone Pine, the site of hundred of westerns and classics such as GUNSMOOL CITY, to shoot in the boulder country of the Alabama Hills. "We did some awesome stuff up there," said Almendras. "It was really freezing. I was standing on some of those rocks, and the wind was blowing so hard I nearly got knocked off. We could see snow on the mountains." Now, tap into the model's website: www.angela.com. □



Angelia Alvarado
[BIX GUN WOMEN]
—in the grip of a
hands-on fan—is
described by photo-
top Linda Tiffens
as “Raquel Welch
+ Cindy Crawford.”
(Thanks to John
Beachler Studios)

Sarah Michelle Gellar

Vampire Slayer

THE ACTRESS RAPS ABOUT "ANGEL," BUFFY'S FUTURE, MOVIES AND HER SUMMER VACATION.

BY EDWARD GROSS



Gellar & the *Angel* gang. "The *ANGEL* spin-off came quickly," she notes. "The *Buffy*-*Angel* story was played out. You don't want to drag it out for five years."

Prior to the commencement of production on the fourth season of *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*, series star Sarah Michelle Gellar was operating in a hit of a creative vacuum; by mid-summer of last year, she had not seen the new season's initial script. And she was just as mystified as the audience at what finally transpired.

"Supposedly, the first script was delivered this morning," she noted in July '99. "I didn't see it. I really don't know that much about it, but I think we're all finding our legs. That's the amazing thing about [series creator/executive producer] Joss Whedon. So often on television shows, you find a couple that work or you find a concept that works and you just keep going with that. And you get very set in those ways and you don't get a

"*Buffy* is now in college," says Gellar. "For the first time in her life, she's leaving home. Hopefully, it will be something lots of young folks can relate to."

SARAH MICHELLE GELLAR

"When Joss [Whedon] told me he had an idea for the ANGEL spin-off, I cried. I don't think we would know how to make our series without him. But he assured me BUFFY's his first love."



chance to explore other ideas. But now Buffy is going to college. For the first time in her life, she's going to leave her home. She's going to leave her boyfriend. She's going to leave her mentor, Giles, and she's going to experience things on her own. Hopefully, that will be something that a lot of young girls and boys can relate to as well. That's what the new season is going to be about: the next step of growing up. And the concept of ANGEL is going to take that even one step farther. That's what happens when you're no longer in school and you're completely on your own, and you have to find your way."

With the advent of the fourth season, one of the critical questions involved the relationship between Buffy and Giles; after all, the vampire slayer had declared her independence and Giles was no longer a Watcher. "The whole idea," Gellar mused, "is basically what happens when your adult figure then becomes almost your friend. What happens when those levels shift? Giles is going to try to separate himself a little bit so that Buffy can find her own legs...she can do things on her own. But Giles will always be there to catch her in case she falls. However, as we all know, Buffy usually solves it before Giles does, anyway. They have a tendency to teach each other, which is really beautiful. That will continue, because he is, for all intents and purposes, her father figure."

Then there was the question of how the departure of David Boreanaz would affect the mix of the show. "I don't really know," Gellar candidly admitted, "and that's the exciting part of it. That's part of

what college is about the unknown. I can't say enough about David. We had the most amazing working relationship I've ever had, and I've been very blessed with the guys I've worked opposite of, including Ryan Phillippe (CRUEL INTENTIONS), Jamie Kennedy (I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER) and Jerry O'Connell (SCREAM 2). I've adored them all. But David and I had a very special relationship. In the three years of working together, we never had so much as a disagreement. That's unbelievable considering the hours we spent together. We

Gellar: "Last year was tortuous for Buffy. She was always questioning everyone. Now she will grow a little."





Gellar: "I think it was heartbreaking for Buffy when Angel [David Boreanaz] left, but, truthfully, they can't be together."

could gauge each other's moods. We could help each other. So, for me, it's very daunting. You have this concern that part of the reason that *BUFFY* worked was because of Angel, and you get these 'What if I can't do it on my own? What if I need David?' anxieties. But it's a very exciting time for him as well. Luckily, it'll be a good challenge for me, and that's what's so wonderful about Joss and the writing on the show. We're constantly moving the storylines. It's not the same thing."

"The truth is," Gellar added, "we always have characters that come and go, and sometimes there are surprises. Harry Gruener, who played the mayor last year—he was brilliant and such a phenomenal person to have around—was originally supposed to be in two episodes. But when he came in, everyone just took to him. Joss said to him, 'Hey, Harry, you want to spend the rest of the season here?' and Harry's like, 'Yeah, great.' And that's sort of where the storyline came from. It was supposed to be a story about Trick, a vampire, not about the mayor. And

now there is another new guy on the show, whether he's for Buffy or not, his name is Elley. Buffy meets him in psyche class, and that's all I know. And Spike is coming back." Fans of the series are now aware of the fact that Buffy and Riley Finn (Morel Binson) have become lovers.

"Joss doesn't like to tell us everything," smiles Gellar, "and with good reason—with me and my big mouth, I'd probably just say, 'Hey, and then there's this great scene in episode 14 where...' So, they have a tendency not to tell us. Another part of the reason they don't tell us is because they don't really know. A lot of it is seeing what works and what doesn't work."

Although not privy to the details of upcoming storylines, Gellar does point out that she certainly wields some influence, particularly with her character. "This show is really Joss' show," she said. "It's his brainchild. We don't change a line. We don't get to come in and say, 'Hey, I have this great idea. What if at the end, he walks away and then Buffy runs up to him, and then—?' because that's not how Joss wanted to tell the story. But if something doesn't work, I'll certainly say something. There was a point in the middle of last year where I turned to Joss and said, 'I'm not happy. I just don't feel like myself. I feel like Buffy's being pushed around by everybody. She's not trusting anybody and I really feel like she's lost herself.' I'm unhappy, because I can't figure out why I'm doing these things.' And we sat down and talked, and he said, 'You know what? I see what you're talking about.' That's when the storyline started changing, and Buffy started to become a little skeptical."

But it was Gellar who was a bit skeptical when Whedon officially an-

Gellar poses for the paparazzi: "I'm very blessed with *BUFFY*. I have a show that is continually challenging, & movies are like an added bonus."



nuanced production of ANGEL, a spin-off show. "Joss is our show," she emphasized. "This is him. And when he first told me that he had this ANGEL concept, I cried. I was excited for David, I was so excited that Joss would have a chance to tell more stories because that's what he does so brilliantly. But I was concerned because I don't think we would know how to make the show without Joss. But now he has assured me that he will not be leaving BUFFY, that BUFFY is his first love. On the other hand, I understand what it's like to be a creative person and to want to do more, and that's why I may do a movie on the off time; and it's why I thank it's wonderful that Joss will have the chance to do both shows. If, God forbid, I need him one day and he's at ANGEL—he's dead!"

Gellar professes genuine surprise that she's often asked, "Will Buffy Summers ever find true happiness?"

"She's had plenty of happy moments," protests the actress. "Like life, it's up and down, and she's had some amazing moments. There was the prom episode, which is one of my favorite episodes, where she's the girl at the prom with no date and they give her this award for being the class protector. No one has ever acknowledged that, in three-and-a-half years, the mortality rate of the school has gone down and that she's confidently saving the day. So there's this wonderful moment where they finally recognize her, and that was incredible for Buffy. And that she does have happy moments, but they're few and far between. There's no drama in happiness."

Enjoying professional prosperity, Gellar has starred in four movies since debuting as BUFFY (only one of them, *SIMPLY IRRESISTIBLE*, was a boxoffice bust). But she declined to make a movie between seasons three and four of BUFFY. "I have to tell you," she smiled, "that was really a painstaking decision because there's so much pressure right

SARAH MICHELLE GELLAR

"There's pressure on all of us—Katie Holmes, & myself included—to do TV & film. You're reminded that as fast as it comes, it goes. There's a paranoia, a need, to keep working."



Gellar & the *CRUEL INTENTIONS* cast (Ryan Philippe, Reese Witherspoon, Selma Blair). "I'm no more the character I played in that movie than I am Buffy."

now on all of us—Katie Holmes, James Van Der Beek and myself—to do television shows and movies and as much as we can [pause]...People constantly remind you that as fast as it comes, it can go. There was this sort of paranoia—this need—to keep working. I know that I felt it and, for the first three years of the show, I never had more than a week off except for Christmas. That was it. So when hiatus came back, I said, "I have to do a movie now." I learned a really good lesson with *CRUEL INTEN-*

TIONS and that was until I felt as passionate about a project as I did with that movie, I didn't want to do another movie again. I'm very blessed with my show; it's continually challenging, it's still exciting to do. Movies are just an added bonus. And for the first time in three years, I decided to take a break and see my friends and have a life. It was the healthiest thing I ever could have done for myself...

"I did a lot of traveling. I went to New York the week that we were done. It was my 22nd birthday and I got

to go to the VH1 Drive Concert and see Tina Turner. I got to meet Cher. It was incredible, and I got to bring a whole bunch of friends for my birthday. Then I went to Europe to promote *CRUEL INTENTIONS*. It was a promotional trip, but I got to see all the places I had never been before, including London and Paris. I was in New York for two weeks to do the season finale of *SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE*, which was the only thing I really had this burning desire to do again.

"I went down to the Dominican Republic for a week to work with President Carter's Habitat for Humanity, which is something I had always wanted to do. The organization builds houses for homeless people. My specialty was making a very good windowsill—at least until someone stepped on it and then I had to re-do it because it wasn't dry. I've learned how to lay floor. I've mixed a ton of cement. I've never had calluses like that on my hands, and my fingers were bloody. Apparently, I've never done an honest day's labor in my life."

"We were in this town called Bodahona, about a half-hour from Santa Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic. When I first got there, a woman took me on a tour of her house and she showed me where her bathroom was going to be. It was the first time she was ever going to have a toilet in her house. Of course, they didn't even know who I was. In the end, once the house was built, they have a ceremony where they give the homeowner a Bible and keys to the house. It was amazing. When I got back [to the States] I was on the bridesmaid tour for a while. I came back about two weeks ago and we were supposed to start shooting the series, but our production kept getting delayed. We start Friday."

Smiling, she lifts herself from a chair and says, "And that was *How I Spent My Summer Vacation* by Sarah Michelle Gellar. Thank you."

Buffy, Vampire Slayer

The last time that co-producer Marti Noxon spoke to *FF* (8:3) was in the middle of her third season on *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*. With the advent of season four, she graduated to "supervising producer." When queried about her promotion, Noxon discharges a "Right, oh right!" declaration and then chronicles corporate evolution. "You start off, like me, as a staff writer—which is like the lowest that you could be. The next rung up is story editor, the next one after that is executive story editor, the next one after that is co-producer, the next one after that is producer, the next one after that [laughs] is supervising producer; and then it's co-executive producer, and then finally executive producer. There are many rungs of the ladder."

But with the serpentine twist of the third season's concluding episodes into a grim, darker psyche (*CONSEQUENCES*, *GRADUATION DAY, PARTS I & II*)—territory similarly chartered by the fourth season's exposition (*HARSH LIGHT OF DAY*, *WILD AT HEART*)—I speculated if Noxon would prefer to return to staff writer, and restore *BUFFY* back to its original, more appealing hybrid of chills and titters.

"It's funny you would ask that," she replies, "because, just the other day, I was thinking we are doing more sort of sillier episodes

MARTI NOXON—SUPERVISING PRODUCER—ON TEEN ANGST, THE DARK SIDE, SEX, CENSORS.

BY MITCH PERSONS



Marti Noxon, *BUFFY*'s supervising producer. "I'm not necessarily suggesting that the episodes I write are all on the grim side; but, sometimes, I think the springboard comes from the deep, dark corners of our writing team's minds."

this season. But I think it's all relative [laughs]. We have gotten used to things being pretty grim. We had things with Angel [David Boreanaz], especially towards the end of last season, that were pretty serious and dark with him leaving Sunnydale, so maybe given the fact that we've been living in that world, things thus far seem a little bit lighter to me this year. The fact is, I can say that through episode nine, there was only one episode in that group—titled *WILD AT HEART*—that was a real serious hummer. That one dealt with the darker side of love, and was a real downer. Naturally, I wrote it.

"I'm not necessarily suggesting that the episodes I write are all on the grim side; but, sometimes, I think the springboard comes from the very deep, dark corners of our writing team's minds. Take *THE WISH*, which I also wrote. That was the episode where Cordelia wishes that Buffy had never come to Sunnydale. The wish comes true and nearly everyone gets turned into a vampire. At one of our story conferences, executive producer Joss Whedon threw out the idea of what would it be like if Buffy had never come to Sunnydale and then, by extension, what would Sunnydale be like if she'd never arrived? We tried to find a way to make that happen, just because we thought it would be sort of fascinating to exercise; but we also knew it would be



BUFFY: "High school's the most horrific time in life, the kids are vicious for no reason," explains Sarah Michelle Gellar. "Now that Buffy's in college, she can have some happiness." Gellar & Alyson Hannigan as "Willow." Simple dialogue. Vampire Willow: "This world's no fun!" Willow: "You noticed that, too?"



MARTI NOXON

"[Exec producer] Joss Whedon thought the first guy Buffy had sex with, after Angel, would be a wake-up call. It was painful for her. College is just full of guys who prey on young women."

very tough to pull off because it was so dark and subtle. I remember writing bits and pieces of it while thinking, 'I hope there aren't any eight year olds who are going to be watching this.' There was the machine which takes the blood out of its victim...and then that kinky scene where you have Willow straddling Angel, who is in chains. But then, too, it was a treat seeing people like Alyson Hannigan and Nicky Brendon playing evil bloodsuckers. That was a part of the story which was on the lighter side. We try to do that as much as possible, even with the more serious episodes.

"THE HARSH LIGHT OF DAY," written by Jane Espenson, was another unsettling story which was offset by humor. Buffy goes to bed with a student named Parker (Adam Kaufman), whom she thinks is going to be another Angel—someone who is going to bring her caring and love—but Parker turns out to be just an opportunistic stud. When Buffy finds out, she is devastated. While she is going through her private hell, Spike the vampire is going through his. He's frantically searching for the Gem of Amara, a precious stone that he believes will enable him to walk about in broad daylight. James Marsters did his usual seriocomic best with the character of Spike, showing his frustration by hurling caustic epithets at his girlfriend Harmony (Mercedes McNab), and then exhibiting the ecstasy of a teenage boy in heat when he finally finds the gem. The scenes with Spike proved a good balance to the story about Buffy which was, quite frankly, a

pretty depressing one.

"Here is another example of the grimmer side of Joss' mind. He wanted Buffy to have a relationship with someone else, but he also wanted to make it very clear that her first choice after Angel would be a bad one—because she's kind of reeling from Angel's leaving, she would probably reach out to someone for the wrong reasons and maybe not consider it long enough, although it is definitely shown that Buffy and Parker had gotten to know each other a little bit. He wasn't like the first guy she happened to meet but I think Joss thought the first guy she had sex with, after Angel, would be a little bit of a wake-up call."

"That wake-up call was just as painful for poor Buffy. College is full of guys who prey on young women, and that was something definitely all of us—Jane, me and Joss—could remember and

Alyson Hannigan as "Spike": "I think I'm sobering up. Horrible. Ah, God... with I was dead?" (right) Alyson Hannigan



relate to. When you are a freshman, you are new prey and there are a lot of guys who do what Parker did, so it just felt very true that Buffy would be 'easy pickings,' especially since she was raw and hurt from the loss of her recent love. There was a lot of the sophomore of senior carnivore that was in Parker."

So will Parker eventually surface in other *BUFFY* episodes?

"Oh, sure...oh gosh, yes," Nixen smiles. "You haven't seen the last of him. And why not? Even though we love our regulars, even we can run out of ideas if we don't keep bringing in new characters and new personalities. In season three, we introduced Wesley Wyndham-Price (Alexis Denisof), Giles' replacement as the Watcher, as well as Buffy's enemy, slayer Faith (Eliza Dushku)."

Yours truly admits that I was less than elated with the debut of Wesley, after all, he's serving as a substitute for the patient and affable Giles.

"That's good, that's great," laughs Marti. "That's exactly what you were supposed to feel. But as time went on, you saw Wesley as sort of a bumbling hot comedic dude and definitely Giles' inferior, in the sense that Giles is older—much older—and wiser. Wesley was actually there, for the most part, as comic relief. It always seemed like he wasn't quite as hinged in reality as the others. And his comedic bumbling hid the ambiguities of his character. You don't really know whether Wesley is on the good side or the bad side—at least not until the very end, where he storms in and really wants to help. At that point, you feel 'This is a good guy, here.'

There was also that 'come up and see me sometime' thing that was going on between Wesley and Cordelia, which we never could have done with Giles. The age difference between Wesley and Cordelia was there, but it wasn't necessarily

MARTI NOXON

"We try to push the envelope as far as we can, & the censors have had no qualms about allowing certain overtly sexual or violent things go. They're great about giving us artistic license."



T) Giles reflects the undead. "The wonderful thing about Buffy is that she always sees things as 'the place is always half full.' She's definitely an optimist. As for the spin-off thing [ANARCHY], it came very quickly." (B) Nicholas Brendon ("Xander"), Giles, Hannigan & Seth Green ("Cordelia"). Green is the only member of the TV cast to perform in the 1992 *BUFFY* movie, though his scenes were cut.



an uncommon thing, whereas if Cordelia had a relationship with Giles...well, to paraphrase that great comedienne Anna Russell, 'She was his student, which would have been awkward—and she was 17 years old, which would have been illegal.'

Nixen's explanation about Giles' inflexibility, and Wesley's more active role, is perfectly rational.

But, personally, I still got annoyed every time wimpy Wesley, in his ill-fitting suit and gaping collar, shows up on the scene. I've often wished I could wield the technology to replace him with a Popeye cartoon. The same criticism could be applied to Faith, who can't seem to draw audience empathy.

"I can safely say," continues Nixen, "that Jess had

created Faith as kind of a shadow relationship. Faith was Buffy's shadow self, the expression of the darker side of what it might mean to be empowered as a slayer. If you were already a troubled girl, as we have hinted that Faith is—if you had no family, no support, no love—what would you do with your powers? Another one of my serial episodes, *CONSEQUENCES*, was about making choices over immediate gratification, choices over simply being empowered and how you use or abuse that power. These are the things that young women and men have to figure out: who are you going to be, and what kind of life are you going to lead?"

"And now the questions and the mistakes for Buffy are much higher, and so it's all much more 'dramatic-like' [laughs]. But Faith was always meant to be somebody who could put all these things that Buffy had struggled with into sharper focus, both for Buffy and for the people watching the show."

"How do you relate to Faith's character?" I inquire. "How do you get under her skin?"

"Well," says Nixen, raising an eyebrow, "by relating to one's own experiences of being a young woman and feeling victimized...and feeling disempowered, feeling like sexuality was—in fact—dangerous because people would try to hurt you, sometimes to take things from you. All that stuff can make a youthful woman really angry, and ready to hurt if she's furnished with some kind of power."

"There is a grueling scene in *CONSEQUENCES* where it looks as if Faith is going to make love to Xander (Nicholas Brendon), but winds up trying to strangle him. That scene was coming from three places: number one, the fact that Xander is usually played for laughs. Audiences were expecting a slapstick love scene like the

one the two of them had in THE ZEPPO, but they were in for a rude awakening. Number two, it would really affect an audience to see that Faith had become so dark-hearted that she really had no soft spot in her heart for Xander at all. And, number three, we were trying to show a little bit of where Faith's rage came from. Her back story is something of an enigma, but clearly she has some control issues [laughs], sexual issues and we just knew that the near-murder scene would be a really shocking and effective way to show that rage! And clearly, sex and love were all mixed up together for her, and she had resolved to be this real badass.

"Incidentally, those scenes involving Xander and Faith were two that we never thought would get past the censors. Those scenes were very explicit, especially the one where Faith has her powerful hands around Xander's neck and he is trying to fight her off, and he is making those horrific

choking sounds. After all this time, though, I should be aware that the people at the WB network are pretty great about giving us a fair amount of artistic license. We do try to push the envelope as far as we can with them but, so far, they have had no qualms about letting certain overtly sexual or violent things go. There are, from time to time, disagreements with our censors; but if conflicts do arise, they usually get resolved without too many toes getting stepped on [laughs].



Alyson Hannigan & Nicholas Brendon in THE WISH episode, "It is a twist seeing people like Alyson & Nicky playing evil masterminds," says Matt Moran. "That was part of the story, which is on a lighter side." Alyson's vamps ("I'm a bloodsucking fiend! Look at my teeth!"). Nicholas: "Our lives are different than other people's".



"GRADUATION DAY PART II," which Joss wrote and directed, and BARSHOT, which was written by Jane (Espinosa), had to do with unprovoked violence against the young people. The episodes were to have been aired around the time of the Columbine High School and the North Valley Jewish Community Center shootings, and the network came to us and said, "We're sorry, but at this time we feel we just can't put these episodes on the air." Now here was one instance where there was absolutely no need for even a nanosecond's worth of disagreement. □

Buffy Babes

Charisma Carpenter

HER REFLECTIONS ON CORDELIA'S EVOLUTION, THE TRANSPLANTATION TO "ANGEL," FAVORITE "BUFFY" EPISODES & FILM ROLES.

BY MITCH PERSONS

One TV show I watched faithfully during the '70s was *THE WALTONS*, a well-written, well-acted pseudo-soaper about a Depression-era family living in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. The central character was John-Boy Walton (Richard Thomas), a soft-spoken, sensitive young man who has dreams of becoming a writer. Once his goals were fulfilled, John-Boy (and Thomas) split from the series. *THE WALTONS* continued to earn laudatory reviews; although another actor was cast a couple of times as John-Boy, he somehow couldn't fill in the role vacated by Thomas. So I simply stopped watching the show.

And so it was with the departure of Cordelia Chase (Charisma Carpenter) from *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*. The tactless, balloon-brained Cordelia kindled a certain friction for the irreproachable Buffy and her cronies, but once Cordelia crossed over to *AN-*



Carpenter: "Cordelia began on *BUFFY* as a blabby high school student, then an unlettered working girl. On the spin-off, she is Angel's yammering girl Friday."

GEL, the spin-off show, *BUFFY*'s prickly inscrutability cooled—and so did my interest in the series.

"I'm very flattered to hear that," says Carpenter, "but I'm also a little saddened, too. Unfortunately, what has been happening since I moved over to *ANGEL* is that journalists have been pitting one series against the other. I'm always asked if I like *ANGEL* better than *BUFFY*. My affections will always be with *BUFFY* for two reasons: one, that show made it possible for me to be on *ANGEL* and two, I loved the people I worked with, including Sarah [Michelle Gellar], Nicky [Brendon] and, of course, Joss Whedon and [co-executive producer] David Greenwalt. There is no bad blood about *BUFFY* at all. It was, strictly speaking, the hand that fed me and the hand that led me."

"I have such fond memories of *BUFFY*. There are episodes that will forever stay in my mind. 'What's My Line—Part Two' was one of them: that was where Xander and Cordelia were trapped in a base-



Cox: "I'm learning more about Courteney. I found the depth, tension & resilience that is within her. In *ANGIE*, I've gotten to explore her facets."

ment, and kissed for the first time. And then there was that really great Valentine's Day episode that was written by Marti Noxon, 'Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered.' That actually was an episode that was written off-the-cuff, very quickly, because Sarah Michelle Gellar was going to do SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE. To accommodate that stint—which was go-



"I have such fond memories of BUFFY," says Cox, who was cast in the pilot episode of *Cordelia Chase*. "When it comes to film work, I'd prefer to do a departure from Cordelia."

ing to be really great promotion for a WB network series like *BUFFY*, with one of our stars on such a successful show like *SNL*—Marti had to write a script that was really lickety-split to allow Sarah some time off. It was a great episode for Nicky and I. Xander casts a spell to make Cordelia want him, and it works on everybody else

except her. My favorite shot of that show is when Xander is coming out of the library, and everybody's noticing him; the camera is on his feet and the music is playing in the background, and the camera comes up to his face and it's in slo-mo. And then there is a cut to everybody's reaction, expressing how they're all

falling in love with him like, 'Who's that hunk?' That is one of my all-time favorites. Then there was 'The Pack,' where Xander got to be really cool and a bad boy, because Nicky does that as well. And then there's the 'Graduation Day—Part 2' episode, which I loved for sentimental reasons. I get to stake my first vampire.

"Now, when I first found out about ANGEL, I was halfway through the second season of *BUFFY*. ANGEL was just in the embryonic stage at that point. When Joss and David came to me with the prospect of going over to ANGEL, I was, of course, excited. I was also a little nervous because I didn't know what that meant for my character, and I didn't know if it would mean more responsibility or if it would be a lateral move—and who would the writers be? I just wanted to know that I wasn't going to be put on high wire without a net, so to speak. There were certain questions about Cordelia that I put to David and Joss which, at the time, they couldn't really answer because there was no script to read. They did assure me that they would take care of things.

"And they have. Both men are very much involved. Joss is still the head honcho, and ANGEL is Greenwald's baby. They give me so much input of where the direction of Cordelia is going. I have a larger responsibility now. I am this 'go-to' person, which is great because Angel [David Boreanaz] is this dark-thinking minimalist. He doesn't say a great deal; he expresses a lot through his emotions.

like it's written all over his handsome face and he's a very serious type. Cordelia—I just love this expression, it's the only way I know to explain her—she's this 'yapping Jaws,' nipping at Angel's heels all the time and because of that chemistry, or that dynamic, the somberness of ANGEL is made lighter and brighter and

entertaining.

"But Cordelia, too, has changed a lot over the years. People, as they get older, do get enlightened; life experiences change them. Cordelia certainly has had her share of life experiences. She started off on *BUFFY* as a bitchy, upper-middle class high school student and then, when her father lost his job, she became an embittered working girl. On *ANGEL*, she's a failed actress and, finally, *Angel's* yammering girl Friday.

"We did one *ANGEL* episode, 'Room With a Vu,' which gave audiences a chance to see how much Cordelia has changed and matured. The segment was directed by one of my favorite directors, Scott McGinnis, and was about Cordelia moving into a flat which was possessed by this female ghost [Beth Grant] who tries to eliminate her. In the final showdown, the woman is threatening Cordelia, who is whimpering and pleading for her life, but then, the grit that is inside her rises to the surface, and she faces the creature down and sends her back to Hell, or wherever she came from.

"In that episode I learned about Cordelia. I found the heroism, depth, and the resilience that is within her. As we go along in *ANGEL*, I'm learning more and more about this woman I play. In *ANGEL*, I've really gotten to explore her facets, all her qualities, all her personality traits. 'Room With a Vu' made me realize how much I admire Cordelia: like how, when it was crunch time, she rose to the occasion and became the strong, brave girl that she really was.

"I keep getting film offers to do characters like Cordelia. Actually, when it comes to film work, I want to do a departure. But I haven't found anything that I want to do, or that appeals to me because the

CHARISMA CARPENTER

"Cordelia is this yapping Jawa who's nipping at Angel's heels all the time; and because of that dynamic or chemistry, the somberness of *ANGEL* is made lighter, brighter & entertaining."



↑ Carpenter (r), flanked by Alyson Hannigan & Sarah Michelle Gellar, shows up for a benefit at the Museum of Television and Radio. (P) Cordelia makes a pact with Buffy on the Sunnydale High campus (Buffy: "Well, that works out great. You won't tell anyone that I'm the Slayer & I won't tell anyone you're a moron.")



roles that are brought up are no different from what I'm doing now. And plus, honestly, this is my first season on a show to which I'm working so many hours. After doing this for nine months, I'm pretty wiped out...

"But whatever decision I make about the future, about the hiatuses and so forth, I'll choose either a movie role that I really want to do or I'm going to Europe...or I'm going to lock myself in my house and fall asleep for three months.

"For me to take on a movie role, it's got to be something special that I really enjoy, and honestly, I'm kind of happy right here in the now. I work with prestigious writers, I have an amazing network behind me, my co-stars are a dream to be with. I feel safe, I feel secure. I'm growing as far as my character grows. I'm basically a



novice, I'm really new at acting and I'm growing in that regard. The crew that I work with from every department—transportation, cameras, everybody I know who comes to our set to work—are top quality. So I really don't have any problems with my life or career. Cordelia is fine. I am fine. Everything is just as it should be." □

Buffy Babes

Kristy Swanson

RECALLING HER PERFORMANCE IN THE ORIGINAL "BUFFY," THIS "GRAPEVINE" STAR COMPARES THE '92 MOVIE TO THE TV SPIN-OFF.

BY MITCH PERSONS

To millions of fans, Sarah Michelle Gellar is the quintessential "Buffy the vampire slayer." However, four years before Gellar made her debut in the TV series, the role was essayed by Kristy Swanson in the theatrical feature; and though that 1992 movie drew only mediocre business, she is indelibly linked to the role. "So many people have gotten confused," says Swanson, catching some rays on a Miami location of GRAPEVINE, a CBS-TV series. "They say to me 'You're Buffy the vampire slayer, aren't you? You're the girl on the TV show.' I tell them, 'No, I was the original Buffy—the one in the movie.' Then they ask, 'Did they ever ask you to play the part in the show?' When I tell them 'No!' they ask, 'Doesn't that bother you?' And I go, 'No, not at all.' Why would it? First of all, I was 27 when the TV series premiered, too old to play the part of a high school girl. Secondly, I've already played Buffy; I already made my mark in a film that's something of a classic. People get the wrong idea. They think I'm sensitive about talking about the TV show whereas I'm actually proud to



Kristy Swanson, 21, plays "Susan Crawford" on GRAPEVINE. The TV series originally debuted in June, 1992 with a different cast; plagued by low ratings and a provocative, the show's longevity was reduced to only 8 episodes.

discuss it.

"The series is very different than the movie. Other than the fact that some of the characters are basically the same, it has nothing to do with the film whatsoever. First of all, the show is shot differently: it's darker, more Nancy Drew-ish. And also, the TV show is much more serious. The film was a lot lighter, fluffier, with more satire.

"The TV show is more genuine-looking than the movie, and I really like that. The actors don't have a lot of makeup on, they're not wearing perfect clothes. Everyone looks like a real person, even though they spend a lot of time doing things that ordinary people just don't do...like slaying vampires.

"It's a good show for young people: kids, and adults can watch it, too. It's good because there is actually a female who is strong and brave—she's a good role model for just about everybody."

Swanson's reflections of Joss Whedon—who wrote the '92 screenplay and later developed the TV spin-off—are equally laudatory: she also singles out Franz Rubel Karui, director of the feature film and an executive producer of the television series, as a primary contributor to the franchise's success.



Swanson as BUFFY in the '92 movie. "People get the wrong idea. They think I'm sensitive about talking about the TV show, whereas I'm really proud to discuss it."

"I really like Joss a lot. I think he's a great guy. And Fran! Fran was wonderful to work with! She is very intelligent, very bright, very articulate. We worked together very well. I think I was 20 or 21 when I did *BUFFY* and Fran was not only my director but—if I got sick or I was feeling a little down—she became almost a second mother. She is very, very sweet."

Was the actress enlightened to Hamul's proposed theatrical sequel to *BUFFY*? "I heard it being batted around," admits Kristy. "But I don't know, it's weird with sequels. If a movie is a huge hit right off the bat, then they'll go and do a sequel right away. The first *BUFFY* movie took a long time to catch on, but if they do make a sequel, I think it'd be great."

"As far as my possible role in a sequel, I couldn't play the part of a teenager, but there could be an entirely different concept. How about Buffy as a mom? her legacy could be passed on to her daughter, who could be the new

vampire slayer."

Subsequent to her role as Buffy, the actress was cast in some independently-produced films. Her more mainstream work includes *DADDY*, *THE PHANTOM* and *EIGHT HEADS IN A DUFFEL BAG*. Swanson acknowledges the latter film, a 1997 black comedy, as "something of a joke. That didn't go so well, but that's okay. It certainly doesn't have anything to do with me, per se. I can put it behind me." She

prefers to discuss "SELF STORAGE" (aka *TINSEL-TOWN*), a film I did that same year (1997) with Ayre Gross. It went to the Montreal Film Festival, where we placed in the top 21 of 420 films. I did another film right after that, *LOVER GIRL*, which was directed by Lissa Adario and Joe Syracuse. That went to the Toronto Film Festival, the AFI Film Festival and then Sundance. Then I shot *DADDY* with both Lloyd and Beau

Bridges. That was fun because it was set in the South, so I had a chance to do a southern accent. I play a socialite in this small Southern town, the very epitome of a southern belle-geuse type."

The variability of her screen characters notwithstanding, Swanson just can't ditch incarnations of Buffy. "A few years ago, I was househunting, and I went over to Breinwood to look at a place over. I walk in and I look on the refrigerator, and there's a photo of Joss Whedon and his then-girlfriend. I'm going, 'That's weird!' Then I'm looking around the house and I see some mail kind of sitting out, and it says 'Joss Whedon' on it. And then I see a *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER* script—one of the TV scripts—resting on a table. I go, 'Oh my God, this is Joss' house!' Obviously this was the house that he was renting and moved from, or whatever, and here I was, innocently househunting in Joss' house. It was very strange, a real trip. I just couldn't believe it." □

Swanson's BUFFY: "I've already made my mark in a film that's something of a classic. The TV show is good because Buffy is a female who's strong, brave...a role model."



Buffy Babes

Kristine Sutherland

THE ACTRESS IDENTIFIES WITH BUFFY'S SUPERMOM: BUT HOW DOES SHE DEAL WITH VAMPIRES & A PSYCHO ROBOT BOYFRIEND?

BY MITCH PERSONS

During the three and a half seasons that *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER* has been televised, viewers have scrutinized the maturing adolescence of Buffy, Xander, Willow and Cordelia (the latter in a marginal capacity). But the character reformation of Buffy's mom, Joyce, has especially manifested a demonstrative character development: she has transformed from a wide-eyed, neodescript homebody to an assertive supermom.

"You'd never guess that the writers would give me that much air time to change after a blunder I made," admits the blonde Sutherland. "It was the very first scene of the very first episode, where I was dropping Buffy off at school. I had done TV before but had never really been involved in a series, so I was very nervous. Things went pretty well with the dialogue, but when Sarah [Michelle Gellar] got out of the car, I put my foot on the gas and lurched backwards! Fortunately, I didn't hit anything but I had that flashback of, 'Oh, my God, what if I plowed into the car behind me?' In my panic, I was also sure that Charlie [Martin Smith, the director] was thinking, 'What kind of incompetent do we have here?,' and I would be fired immediately. Of course, I wasn't."

"I did stay on and, bit by bit, Joyce grew figurative wings and began to test the air. I have to credit the



Kristine Sutherland as Joyce Summers. "Buffy & Joyce have a strong, loving bond. I have the same bond with my own daughter and I try to bring it to the show's scenes."

BUFFY writers and directors and the other cast members, for that. Each week, you pick up a script and see what you're going to be doing. You go in and do it with the writer's conception in mind, but maybe a director will suggest something—or you, yourself, may bring something to it or another actor may suggest, 'Why don't you do it this way instead?' So the material and the character expand, and things evolve from all the input.

"I believe the turning point for Joyce was in an episode called 'School Hard.' If you remember, Spike the vampire was attacking Buffy, and Joyce comes up from behind him and clobbers him with an ax or a shovel and says, 'Get the hell away from my daughter!' At that point, Joyce turned

from an everywoman working mom into a real spitfire.

"But I don't think any real life mother would have done anything different. The protective instinct is something that every parent has, or should have. If you feel your child is threatened, you will risk body and soul to save them. I lived a good deal of my adult life in Manhattan, and had a small daughter to raise. Now, if I were living in the suburbs of Long Island and I wanted to take a trip, I would just bundle up my little girl, throw her in the car and take off. Not so in Manhattan. You constantly have to keep your eyes open to various dangers. I had friends who were attacked, even on busy Broadway streets in broad daylight. I remember, a couple of years ago, hearing of a grandmother who was crossing Broadway with her grandson, as a bus or a car was barreling down on them, she ran and threw the little boy out of the way. The bus hit and killed her. But when you're a parent, you understand that. You don't even think about it."

"You really have to have your antennae out. I've stood up to 200-pound crazy men, because I thought my daughter's life might be in danger. There's just a fierceness in terms of protecting your child, where you don't even think about yourself or whether you're strong enough to take this person on. It always reminds me



Cast as Buffy's mom (g. Sutherland also appeared in *HONEY I SHRUNK THE KIDS* & *LEGAL BASILIS*; R. Reardon; center with Anthony Stewart Head ("Tide")

of that line that comedian Sid Caesar used in a sketch, 'Heroes are only brave cowards.' So true.

"The protective urge is not the only characteristic that has emerged from Joyce. She's a dedicated, single, working mom, just as I am. To be a single mother in this day and age takes a certain amount of resoluteness and grit. There are a lot of things that single moms have to stand up to and sometimes—with all good intentions—they can go over the edge. A case in point is 'Gingerbread,' in which Joyce becomes a vigilante.

"Then there is that strong, loving bond that Buffy and Joyce have. I have that same bond with my own daughter and I try to bring it to the scenes in the show, which is actually not that difficult. Sarah and I get along very well away from the set. We don't really socialize much, but

there are good vibes between us. I can't really speak for Sarah, I can only speak for myself but there's a crossover of my relationship with her as Sarah, and my relationship with her as Joyce, her mother.

"I am fond of all the cast members and I'm particularly fond of James Marsters, who plays Spike. I've always enjoyed when he's around. The feelings we have for each other bleed through, and give a scene the texture and depth that makes it more interesting than if we had just met five minutes prior to working together.

"It was in the episode 'Lovers' Walk,' where Spike finds himself sitting in Buffy's living room talking to Joyce. Here he is, a vicious vampire, and he's lolling around in Buffy's home as casually as if he were picking Buffy up for a date. Joyce looks at him

KRISTINE SUTHERLAND

"Although I had a great time with *LOVER'S WALK*, I'd have to say my favorite episode—as an actress—was *BAND CANDY*. As a viewer, my favorite episode was *WHEN SHE WAS BAD*."

strangely and says, 'Don't I know you from somewhere?' and he calmly answers, 'Yes. You hit me over the head with an axe once.' More people have written in with nice comments to both of us about that scene. Naturally, the writers created the dialogue and the director, David Soren, was responsible for the timing; but if James and I hadn't had such a good rapport, that scene—and particu-

then she did a provocative dance with Xander that was such a torturous tease. It was cruel to do that to him and to treat other people badly. So I was taken back with the last scene of that episode because it's about friends saying, 'We love you and there's room to forgive you.' Not all of us get to dig up The Master's bones and make our nightmares go away, but I think all of us—even long past adolescence—have days when we offend a friend without meaning it because we're thinking of ourselves.

"My third favorite episode is 'Ted,' where John Ritter seems to be Mr. Nice Guy and then turns out to be a psychotic robot. In this episode, Joyce shows another facet of her personality, that of a vulnerable woman

who needs and wants this man's love. But what was so amazing about the 'Ted' episode for me was remembering when I was a teenager. My mother, who was also single at the time, was dating men and I wanted to run them off, much as Buffy wanted to run Ted off. These guys weren't evil robots, but I felt very threatened by them. I wanted to know what they wanted to do with my mother and I was very suspicious of what their motives were. I did not want the two of them to get physically intimate. The reason 'Ted' lingers in my mind is that the episode strikes a lot of chords with both people who are young and in it at the moment, as well as adults who remember what it was like to be there."



Eliza Dushku, Vampire Slayer

RECALLING THE "BIRTH" OF FAITH AND A PROVOCATIVE EPISODE, SHE ADMITS "STAYING WITH 'BUFFY' IS NOT WHAT I WANT TO DO."

BY MITCH PERSONS

"Okay, the first syllable of my last name rhymes with 'push,'" explains Eliza Dushku, "and the second syllable is pronounced 'koo' with a long 'oo' sound. It's amazing what people will come up with when they see that name, which, by the way, is Albanian-Danish. There is a joke in our family that the Dushku's and the Belushie's are the only Albanians in show business. Who knows? That might be true."

Dushku, with her tempestuous glow and supple, athletic body, has stalked Faith—*BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*'s nemesis—into a formidable, adolescent *femmes fatale*.

"I'm only 18," she shrugs, "but I generally play older. I was supposed to be a high school student in *TRUE LIES* (1994), but I was 12 at that time. And in *BYE BYE LOVE* ('85) I was about 13. I portrayed Emma, an intolerable brat in that one, but in the end it was revealed just exactly why she was that way. You see, her parents were divorced and she was afraid that things would never be the same between her father [Paul Reiser], whom she adored, and herself as she was on the de-

fensive all the time.

"There are some similarities between Emma and Faith. Faith comes from unknown origins—either her parents are dead, or maybe they just abandoned her. It's not too clear—so she wasn't raised with anyone keeping her in check; hence, she rebels against her solitude by saying and doing anything that just pops into her mind. She is a hellion, a real adrenaline junkie and someone who no guy in his right mind would ever want to date. But, like Emma, Faith is as, as vulnerable. She's scared to be alone, she has moments of great self-doubt and she really has no friends at all."

"In the beginning, when Faith first came in, she tried really hard to get into the loop and make friends, but no one was quite on her same page. The second she got the slightest feeling of denial, she reacted so strongly and then started plotting against people. For instance, Faith started off as a sidekick of Buffy's, since the two of them were both slayers. But once Faith accidentally killed a man, it started a chain of events that turned her into Buffy's enemy. Faith was forced to take solace with the only person who seemed to want



Dushku greets convention attendees. "Faith is a teenager, just as I am. And, like me, she is trying to find herself. She's still growing up." (Photo: Al Orteaga)



Davis: "Faith was initially just going to be in a couple episodes. But because she's as different from Buffy, Faith was made into a third season regular."



Angel (David Boreanaz) tests his Faith (Dushku). Some of the female character's choice dialogue: 'I've had my share of loves, but you—you're kind of the unless.'

to have her near him, and that was Mayor Wilkins (Harry Groener), a demon.

"Wilkins is the only one who really accepts Faith—and even when she screws up, he sort of enjoys that! Matter of fact, he almost encourages her. The whole relationship is so twisted but he is her only true friend, the only real person she has. It's sad. There are a few episodes where Faith opens up to Wilkins, starts telling him stories about her past, her family and how she became one screwed-up kid. So it is sad, you feel bad for her because she is so extreme and she hurts other people.

"When Faith accidentally killed Finch, the Mayor's assistant, there was a trace of the frightened little girl lurking inside her. There was a scene, which most people have forgotten, after Faith runs off from the site of the killing. She returns to it, leans down and it's like a

reality check for her: at that point, she genuinely feels some remorse but, all of a sudden, people are attacking her and she goes on the defensive and basically goes into complete denial. Something happens like that, everyone's on her back and she pushes everyone away and pretends, 'I don't care.' She rationalizes, 'Okay, you know what? Maybe I'm just a bad person, that's what it is. And if you don't like it, well then, screw you!' Then she keeps getting worse and

worse. There was one episode, 'Consequences,' where Xander goes to visit Faith to talk her into giving herself up. Well, she throws him on the bed and—unlike another episode, 'The Zeppo,' where she and Xander make passionate love—Faith nearly strangles the poor guy to death.

"These scenes were hard for me, especially the one in 'Consequences,' where Faith shows her homicidal side. I've had people come up to me and tell me that they

have not seen such a goosebumpy scene in a long, long time. I even get a bit unnerved doing it. The love-making scene was a little easier to take for me, but not a great deal. It was a pretty risqué bit, one that gave new meaning to the phrase 'jump on your bones' because that's literally what

Faith did to Xander. Also, Nicky (Brendan, who plays Xander) is a good ten years older and a lot bigger than I am, and in that scene I had to be the total aggressor. I

Dushku: This business is so screwy. I've been in it since I was 16 years old & part of me can relate to being a wild child like Faith. I can understand her getting that adrenaline high of being a bad girl, and the attention that comes with it."



was raised as a Mormon, and that seems so shocked my family that my grandmother wouldn't talk to me for two weeks! Finally, she did break her silence and you know what she said? She said, 'I can't believe you're such a disgusting character.'

"I can't really say I blame my grandmother for feeling that way I look at my family life. I was raised by my three older brothers and my mother. When someone did something bad, there was always someone to act as a disciplinarian. There are times in everybody's life when you screw up, and if something is handled the wrong way—or it isn't handled at all—it can totally mess you up.

"To this day, I am extremely thankful for my family and what they've done, but I remember times ... well, this business is so screwy and I've been in it since I was ten years old, and part of me can relate to being a wild child like Faith. I did a film in Australia when I was 14 years old, and I had to have a hired guardian. I thought, 'Come on now, how wild can you be at 14?' But I didn't really have someone there to help me out and lead me in the right direction, so I turned into a little bit of a lead girl. I can understand Faith getting that adrenaline high off of being the bad girl, and the attention that comes from it.

"That could be the reason I find Faith so easy to play even though, even in my wildest moments, I could never be as wild as she is. The ease in characterization helped me so much because at the beginning, when Faith first comes onto the scene ('Faith, Hope & Trick' episode, 10/13/98), no one was really happy with how the character was coming off. Initially, I was just going to be in a couple of episodes—a short-lived hit as something of an action freak, adding a little excitement and a little bit of

ELIZA DUSHKU

44 The lovemaking scene in THE ZEPPO gave new meaning to the phrase, 'jump on your bones' because that's literally what Faith did to Xander. My grandma wouldn't talk to me for weeks."



Dushku: "Faith started off as a crossdresser of Buffy's, since the two of them were sisters. But once Faith accidentally killed a man, it started a chain of events..."

the bad side...and basically bringing some darkness into Sunnydale, where everyone seems happy and everyone's got these great morals. .

"Then, because she was so different from Buffy and her cronies, Joss Whedon decided to make Faith a third season regular. But there were a few changes that had to be made. Faith's character was pretty undefined. Was she supposed to be a villain? A hero? Was she sympathetic? Apathetic? No one really knew. Joss started getting to know me, and he wrote in what he thought would work for me. Some parts of Faith were like me, and some parts were unlike me. It was Joss, the other creators and their hard work that made Faith who she was. I just followed along, read my lines and, eventually, the full 'I don't really like you, but you inspire my pity' character of Faith emerged.

"Faith is a teenager just as I am and, like me, she is trying to find herself. In

many ways, she's still growing up. The others on the show—people like Sarah [Michelle Gellar], Nicky [Brandon] and Alyson [Hannigan]—are all older, in their twenties and early thirties, and they bring more of their lives into their characters because they have seen sides of life that I haven't seen. I have to draw on my own youthful experiences in order to being the character of Faith to reality.

"What is beautiful is that all of the other cast members are forever aware that I am so young, and they're all really protective in a way. I came out here from Boston, all by myself, to do *BUFFY* and before that I usually had some family member close at hand to depend on. Everyone on *BUFFY* was really cool about saying, 'If you ever need anything and, if you need to talk or whatever, we are here.' They were all really supportive of how young I was. No one crossed over the line and made me feel uncomfortable.

"Someone who helped me tremendously was Harry Groener, the man who plays Mayor Wilkins. He is so cool. He's so much fun. He makes me totally relax. He is so great at improvisation. Watching him get these monologues of this wacky guy he's playing...his character is such a trip, and Harry creates a lot of the stuff he does. He really took this character and went all the way with it. You can almost hear his brain ticking. You go in for rehearsal and he has his script, but no one knows what he's going to do; however, once he figures it out or tries a couple of things—he's not scared to try anything—it's so amazing. It can be intimidating in a sense, but Harry always tries what his gut instinct is, and that is refreshing. He is one smart guy and he's also such a sweetheart.

"It's always nice when actors in real life are down-to-earth. I'm one of the most down-to-earth people there is. But so is Harry, and it's really nice to see people like that in the business because so much of the business is so crazy. There's lots of warped people in this industry.

"In all truth, as much as I like doing *BUFFY*, I would like to return to film work. Staying with the show is not really what I want to do. I think I would like to test out the waters in other places a little more. There are a lot of different scripts right now that I'm seeing. There's some good stuff out there, and there's obviously some really crappy stuff. My mother was just out visiting—she's a professor of government at a college in Boston—and she's been a huge part in helping me with my career, like in choosing what I should or should not do. The same with my manager. So we're looking at different things, different parts. But no more teenagers. I usually get to play older anyway, so I figure why not look for older parts?"

The Books of Buffy, the Vampire Slayer

LES FEMMES ARE LITERALLY WRITING THE BOOKS ON "BUFFY": WILL THEIR WORK APPLY A FRESH SLANT TO HORROR FICTION?

BY DENISE DUMARS

He was used to being admired by women—did the Watcher Diaries not record his full name as “Angelus, the one with the angelic face?” But he was not used to anyone looking past that face into his soul.

—*The Angel Chronicles*

Vol. 1 by Nancy Holder

Nancy Holder is sitting at a table in the sunlit Oscar Room of the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel. It's the weekend of the Bram Stoker Awards ('99), the Horror Writers Association's annual ceremony, and it couldn't be held in a better place. Behind Holder and fellow-*Buffy* author Yvonne Navarro is a huge table filled with ice cream and toppings; we're at a social held in the same room where the very first Academy Awards convened. And it's a locale where *Buffy* Summers would be right at home: after all, the hotel is reputed to be haunted. A seance is scheduled for 11 p.m. Through the window, we can watch swarms of people lining up outside Mann's Chinese Theater for



Nancy Holder, *Buffy* novelist: "I'm a native Californian and I grew up in a place like Sunnydale. When I saw *BUFFY*, I got the chills. I figured they'd cancel it!"

the next showing of *STAR WARS: EPISODE I—THE PHANTOM MENACE*.

“My book is going to be delayed because of the *Litton* [Co.] tragedy, as is the episode it's based on,” Holder says wistfully, referring to her latest *Buffy* book and to last season's finale of the series, which aired in Canada but had been postponed in the U.S. until July 13th. It's clear that she's a little upset by the postponement, but the writer perks up as she tells me about conferring with David Boreanaz regarding his Angel character.

Nancy Holder has been writing *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* novels since 1996. After screening only three TV episodes, she called her friend and fellow scribe Christopher Golden. “We'd been wanting to collaborate on something for some time,” she says. “And then we called our agents and they got right on it. No one knew if *BUFFY* was going to be a prime time hit, and no one expected it would become the kind of hit it has turned into.”

So how did she garner such a plum assignment? “Through a fellow author, I met an editor at Random

"What initially attracted me to *BUFFY* was the calibre of the scripts; they're brilliant. It's much more true-to-life than anything about teenagers that was on when I was a teen."



SUNNYDALE HIGH YEARBOOK

Christopher Golden and Nancy Holder

Nancy Holder's Sunnydale High Yearbook. Resuscitating *The Watcher's Guide*, Holder learned "each time a vampire gets staked on *BUFFY*, it costs \$5,000."

House on e-mail," Holder explains. "She had been an editor at Zebra and she said, 'I'm trying to get the rights for a certain show on Monday nights.' I knew exactly what show she was talking about, and I was extremely stoked. She said, 'You want to do it?' And I called Chris Golden, as we'd been trying to find something to write together. He said, 'Let's write one together.' But the editor didn't get the rights, the books weren't published by Random House. So I told Chris, 'Let's get our agents on it,' and we found out who had it, and faxed her five ideas and within two days we had approval."

By the time the pitch had been approved, only four *BUFFY* episodes had broadcast. "Only the novellization

of the movie was out. But we were the first to do original novels. The first and third book of *The Angel Chronicles* are novelizations, and the other books are all original. I did those by myself. Chris and I have written seven novels and *The Watcher's Guide* together."

When I'm told that Holder's lead time is only six weeks per book, my jaw drops. The demographics of *BUFFY* have shown not only lego but crossover appeal as well; once generically branded a "teen" show, the series has also attracted an adult audience, not to mention a franchise that includes the sole of merchandising tie-ins (card sets, calendars, posters, action figures, chalices, T-shirts,

magnets, cape, key chains, you name it). The success, of course, has also spawned a profusion of cyberspace homages.

"*The Angel Chronicles*, and the first one I wrote are Young Adult books," relates Holder. "Bleeding, the second book Chris and I wrote together, was the bridge book between the YA and adult. The rest are books for adults. We weren't sure that adults would buy them... but then they found out that the average age of the *BUFFY* viewer is 29! The books come out one every two months. They alternate adult and YA."

"*Angel Chronicles* #1 was nominated for a Stoker, and was considered the best selling horror title that came out last September [1998]. It beat out Stephen King." The books are novelizations of several TV episodes that document the genesis of Angelus (aka Angel), and the development of his relationship with Buffy.

Holder, a four-time Stoker award winner, introduced the Stoker Lifetime Achievement award winners at the '99 banquet; the recipients included novelist Ramsey Campbell and renegade producer/director Roger Corman.

In addition to her surfest of awards and achievements, Holder's appeal is commercial as well as creative. "The Watcher's Guide, which I wrote, was on both the *USA Today*, and the *L.A. Times* bestseller lists," she says proudly.

Yvonne Navarro was admitted to the club when she was recommended by Holder and Golden. Their editor queried if they could recommend someone to write another *Buffy* book; since

Navarro was cited as a "vampire person," she was aptly qualified.

"I've done novelizations before," states Navarro, referring to her *Aliens* adaptation and two novelizations of the *Species* series. "And I was also a fan of the *BUFFY* show. The book that I'm doing is *The Willow Files*, a three-part series. In this, Willow is the center of the universe instead of Buffy." The first of *The Willow Files* premiered in December '99.

Navarro reminds me of a grown-up Buffy. For one thing, she's a practitioner of martial arts. She's also blonde and dressed in light sweatshirts, while most of the other horror writers in attendance are attired in black. The author recounts that the first movie she ever saw was a drive-in screening of *Hitchcock's THE BIRDS*. Her published nov-

Holder's *Angel Chronicles*. "Nominated for a Stoker, book #1 was the best selling horror title in September '98."





Yvonne Navarro, *BUFFY* fan & author of *The Willow Files* (3) as well as revitalized adaptations of *ALIENS* and *SPACEMEN*

working on a psychological thriller called *That's Not My Name*. Check out her website: www.parn.net/~ynavarro

I asked Holder if she'd consider writing an episode of *BUFFY*. "I'd consider it," she replies, "but they have a full staff of writers, and I think they'd want a completed screenplay to look at first—and, well, I have enough on my plate right now. I'd go through my agent about it, of course, if I decided I wanted to write one."

Working closely with *BUFFY* creator Joss Whedon, Holder consulted with two staff writers while compiling *The Watcher's Guide*. "Joss has gone through a staff a season. After we interviewed the two writers, they were gone! I respect scriptwriting as a form, and I don't assume I'd be good at it just because I can write novels. I'd like to try it, I

took a class..." After all, Holder does live in Southern California, where—for some nebulous reason—it's incumbent upon most of the area's residents to pop-out screenplays.

Navarro, on the other hand, is not from Southern California. She is, however, a friend of J. Bonansinga, who has a degree in screenwriting and has been hired to write scripts based on her own books. "He'd like me to write a mini-series based on my books *Red Shadows* and *Final Impact*," says Navarro. "He asked for a treatment and his reaction was, 'We have to sit down and talk about this.' So I can't even get the treatment right, which shows you how much success I had at it! And I've known people who set aside their novel writing to write scripts, and their careers have taken quite a hit for it."

Her Willow books, based

on three scripts, are aimed at the eighth-grade reading level. Navarro's first book was published in 1991 and, in May of last year, she was able to jettison her "day job" and pursue writing full-time. In a day and age when most scribes can't subsist on their writing income alone, this is pretty darn near renaissance!

Holder is also writing for *WISHBONE*, a children's TV series in which a very animate dog acts out great literature. "It's a ghost story by Charles Dickens called *The Portrait Painter's Story*. It's in a Halloween anthology called *Tales of Terror*, but my *WISHBONE* version of it is called *A Brush with Terror*. Get it?" We all laugh heartily.

I almost fall over when Holder tells me that 41 of her novels have been published since 1981. "Most of it has been since my daughter was born, oddly enough."

YVONNE NAVARRO, AUTHOR

"Why did BUFFY appeal to me? Vampires, vampires, vampires. The dialogue is so good and crisp, it's funny and sad at the same time. I feel so bad for Buffy: she's the ultimate outcast."

She and her husband Wayne, and their young daughter Belle, live in San Diego.

Holder launched her career by writing romances but she's been impassioned with horror fiction. As a juvenile, she played with a magic set; but the only trick that really intrigued her was the "sawing a woman in half" chestnut. She incinerated her Barbie dolls in ritualistic Viking funerals. I first encountered her work in *Shadows*, a series of horror anthologies edited by Charles Grant. I was smitten with her flair for the genre; imagine my surprise upon learning she cut her teeth on Harlequin-type romances!

Outlining her '98 venue, she alludes to uncompromising and marginal horror titles: "Last July, my *Sabrina*, the Teenage Witch book

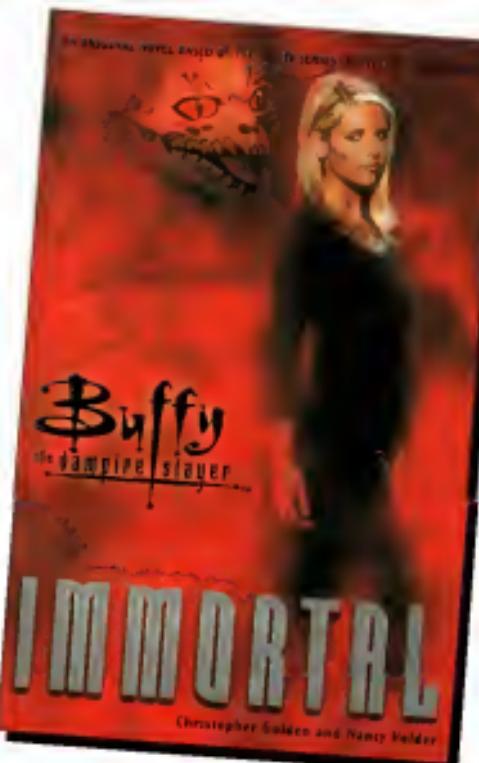
Holder's *Sons of Entropy*. "We were unsure if adults would buy them the average age of *BUFFY* viewers is 20!"

was released. The following month, *Angel Chronicles 3* hit the shelves. I have done a total of three *Sabrina* books. And then I did *Sabrina's Tales*, which was written for second graders."

I asked both writers which specific qualities of the *BUFFY* series prompted them to transplant the television legacy to the print medium. "What originally attracted me to *BUFFY* was the caliber of the scripts—they're amazing and brilliant," rhapsodizes Holder. "The show is much more true-to-life than anything about teenagers that was on when I was a teen. And the episodes are not really just about teenagers, they're about working through the monsters of life. Plus, I'm a native Californian, and I grew up in a place like Sunnydale, so I just click with Buffy. When I saw Buffy, I got the chills. This is really my show!" I thought. And I figured that they'd cancel it [long] ago."

Navarro, well-known for her stories of blood lust, says her attraction to *BUFFY* was "crystal-clear. It's vampires, vampires and more vampires [ough]. But seriously, the dialogue is so good and so crisp. It's funny and it's sad at the same time. Out of all the characters, I feel so bad for Buffy, because all she wants is to have a normal life. She wants a normal boyfriend, and her mother wants a normal daughter—and it's never going to happen. No one else but this little group of friends knows—and they're the only ones who accept her. Buffy is the ultimate outcast."

Holder learned an interesting tidbit about the show as she was researching its



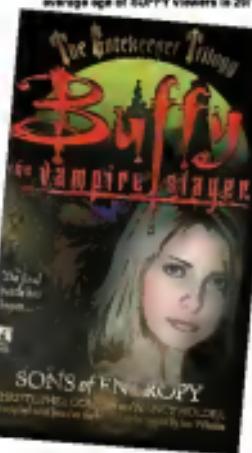
Holder's solo *Buffy* books include *Immortal*. "I'd consider writing for the TV show but they have a full staff of writers & I have enough on my plate."

background. "I interviewed the special effects team for *The Watcher's Guide*. Each time a vampire gets dusted (i.e. staked and turned to dust) it costs \$5,000. So I sit there saying, 'Wow, they just spent another \$5,000!' And the teeth are always the last to disappear."

Holder's solo *Buffy* books include *The Angel Chronicles 1 & 3*, and *The Evil That Men Do*. She and her cowriter, Christopher Golden, have written *Halloween Run*, *Bloodied*, *Child of the Hunt*, a *Gatekeeper Trilogy*, *Immortal* and *The Watcher's Guide*. I've just started reading Vol. I of their trilogy, *Out of the Madhouse*, and find I can't put it down. The release of *Sunnydale School Yearbook* is imminent, and we can look for-

ward to more collaborative and solo *Buffy* books while the television series prosters. Holder has also written two very well-received horror novels, *Making Love* and *Witch-Light*, with fellow horror writer Melanie Tem. Her solo horror novel, *Dead in the Water*, is a chilling tale (just think *JAWS* meets *THE USUAL SUSPECTS*). And for variety, she's written sci-fi fare as well.

A couple of rowdy guys behind us threaten to start a food fight. Holder laughs, shakes her blonde head and shows off her dimples. She, too, would very compatibly fit into the Southern California landscape that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* inhabits. All that darkness in the midst of so much light...







When I turned green
I didn't know I
could run like this
no one else was
there. People just...
I tried to get out of
the heat I want it to
be like a shield a safety
net for your face."

Sophia Crawford The Slayer Side of Buffy

A STUNT WOMAN WITH BITE! LITERALLY BURNED-UP OVER 'BUFFY, THE ACTION STAR RECALLS A PROFESSIONAL ODYSSEY THAT HEATED-UP IN HONG KONG.



Crawford poses
for Dennis Goff.
"For this three-
hour DAIRK MEDIUM
session [in] I was
painted with three
layers of latex. It
was incrementally
stripped off during
the photo shoot."



Draped in a white, flowing wedding gown, Buffy departs from a church. Suddenly, she's swept into flames: within 15 seconds, the vampire slayer is literally toast. Charbroiled.

"Cat!"

As the "stunt dummy" is hosed down, Sophia Crawford—a veteran of Hong Kong actioners who serves as Sarah Michelle Gellar's stunt double—is prepping to be incinerated for the money shot. She studies the flames with raised eyebrows. "Whoa, that went much faster than expected," she exclaims in a British accent. "The wind could be a problem. I hope it doesn't blow the flames into my face." The crew hushes into a tremulous silence. The dummy was supposed to kindle into a controlled bonfire, not be totally cremated. Crawford keeps her cool...

"I have happy thoughts about it all," she explains. "The worry about the wind is once you start burning, it can engulf you very quickly. We'll just have to set up a fan to blow the flames away from my face." Locking her gaze on the crispy mannequin, Crawford frowns and exhales, "Time to get ready." Jeff Pruitt, the series' stunt coordinator and Crawford's fiancé, nods and growls, "Okay, let's do this." I follow them down to the church basement...

The fight choreographed for *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER* approximates the martial arts action of Hong Kong movies, although a pretty good imitation of those precursors, the series' roughhousing lacks the convictions of its Asian counterpart. But the show is hardly bereft of a genuine, ardently-trained combatant, courtesy of Ms. Crawford. She mixes it up with stunt men, many of whom moonlight on

"In the middle of the night, guards busted in. They poked guns in our chests, pulled us out of bed & spirited us to a public mosque to lash us 'cause men & women slept in the same room!"



Crawford on the *BUFFY* set: "At the beginning of the week, we do a lot of day work. We end up in the graveyard Friday night and working till 4 AM Saturday."

the MARTIAL LAW series.

I had been introduced to Crawford a few weeks earlier at a quaint Thai restaurant in Van Nuys. Dressed in a black ensemble that flashed her porcelain, California-tanned appendages, the green-eyed Brit is among the more intriguing femme fatales whom I interviewed for this magazine.

"It all started in 1986, when my sister, Ingrid, and I decided we wanted to go to Africa," recounts Crawford. "I finished school at 16, and worked in a restaurant for a year to save money for the trip. Ingrid and I found this guy who drove the 'Magic Bus' in the '60s. All of us—me, Ingrid and 14 friends—pitched in 200 pounds [\$170] to cover the cost of gas and food and took off. He wanted to go to India so we changed our plans. We took a ferry from Belgium then drove to Germany, East Germany, Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey and on. We pitched tents, and rotated on cooking and cleaning. It was a hard trip. Sixteen of us started and eight

finished.

"The Iran thing was really a bad experience. We had problems in Iran because of the war [pause]... It happened when we were driving to Isfahan. It was getting late and we couldn't drive through the Beligisfan Desert because of the risk of bandits, so the bus driver said we should stop for the night. The problem was, there were no guest houses, hotels or any place to stay. We planned to sleep on the bus, but the police came and said we couldn't. People started gathering around. One guy came out of the crowd and said he had a room that we could use. It had lots of beds and we could leave in early morning."

"Well, in the middle of the night, guards burst in and poked guns in our chests—then they pulled us out of our beds. Some of us were dragged out by our hair. It was very scary. They tried to pull us to their public mosque and chain us to those plaques. They were preparing to publicly lash

us because we had men and women sleeping in the same room. We screamed, 'We were told it was okay!' They don't speak English and just got angry. While explaining it was a misunderstanding, we got onto the bus and left. We later learned that the guy turned us in so he could gain merit and more food rations. It's not fun being in a foreign country where you don't speak the language and they have weapons. You never know what's going to happen."

The trip was also handicapped with inclement weather: "We left in winter and it was bloody freezing in Europe. It was so cold in Eastern Turkey that, when we woke up, our eyes were frozen shut. Once in India, our bus driver knocked over an orange cart and the populace threw stones at the bus [laughs]. They broke the windows... I mean, we literally got stoned. We spent 36 hours on a train from Calcutta to Madras, sleeping underneath a bench and flanked by hundreds of friendly but smelly people. It was horrible."

"Then the driver intended to sell the bus in Kathmandu. We barely made it there. So we travelled around India, then off to Nepal. After Nepal, we went to Thailand and I fell in love with the area. Ingrid didn't want to stay, she wanted to go to South America. She went, I stayed. I ended up living in Bangkok for one and a half years."

Needing money in Thailand, Ms. Crawford—then 20—"fibbed" her way into a job by convincing Central Plaza Hotel officials that she was a 28-year-old graduate whose B.B. degree fully qualified her to tutor the staff in English. "I had to do that," she affirms, "because I couldn't be the same age as my students, and I really needed the job."

Crawford's residence was a community boarding house for women near Patpong, a locale often identified as Bangkok's red light district. "Some of the girls

who lived there were dancers and strippers," she recalls. "They were really lovely girls. They'd knock on my door at 8:00 a.m., asking me if I could write letters to their German boyfriends. It was usually, 'Will you marry me?'"

While living in Thailand, she worked as an extra in a string of films—including *KICKBOXER*—which were predominantly officiated by Hong Kong film crews. Crawford was subsequently tipped-off that films produced in Hong Kong remunerated actors with pay on a more substantive scale. Once again, she packed her bags...

"I didn't know anyone, so I'd just hang around the guest fous (a racial slur, reserved for caucasians, which translates into white trash). I started training martial arts for film but things didn't get intense until I got a role in *NEW KIDS IN TOWN*. I had no idea of the level of skill that was needed to do these fight films. I was so bad that they just kept killing me off to get me off the set. It hurt me. I knew they did it to get rid of me, because I couldn't remember the fight moves. It was new for me. I was an actress who didn't know how

Crawford at the *BluffY* cemetery set: "The cast watches us do stunts. They cheer us on when it's tough."



SOPHIA CRAWFORD

"In Hong Kong film, women are feminine even though they can kick butt, but the gwei lou are butch. They made me look dykey. I had muscles but the Chinese girls look like dolls."



Ms. Crawford relaxes in *BLUFFY*'s college digs. "This season's campus setting means new locales and new buildings to jump off—and new fight challenges."

to fight."

The biggest impact on Crawford's career was prompted by her alliance with Hong Kong actress Yukari Oshima (aka Dai Do aka Cynthia Luster), whose track record included acrobatics (e.g. Jackie Chan's *PROJECTS*) and the thoroughly demented *STORY OF RIKKI*. "For whatever reason, Dai Do (pronounced 'dyo dough') was impressed with me," recalls Crawford. "She signed me to her company and made me part of her action crew stunt team, which was an honor for a gwei lou. So she took me under her wing and I did a bunch of films with her. Then my roles got bigger, I had a few more leads and made more money."

Over a five-year period, Crawford—who turned into the hulset caucasian in Hong Kong's film colony—was cast in 36 films; minor parts in *CHINA HEAT*, *THE VENGEANCE*, and *THE BIG DEAL* were catalysts for beefier roles in the likes of *THE CYPRUS TIGER*, *BEAUTY INVESTIGATOR*,

and *RAGING COP* (some of these titles are accessible from Tai Sang Videos, 1-888-688-8338).

"My final film was a starring role in Wong Jing's fantasy, *BACK FROM THE FUTURE*. Although I made lots of money, I felt it was time to leave Hong Kong. I didn't care about being typecast because I enjoy doing action roles, they're my first love. I left because I didn't want to be there for 1997. I felt isolated from my mother tongue because I did all my lines in Cantonese, and that made it hard to have fun in front of the camera. I wanted more emotional involvement and be in touch with my character. To do that, I must speak English! A token gwei lou can only go so far."

Arriving in Los Angeles (circa 1994), Crawford body doubled for the pink crusader on the *POWER RANGERS* television series and its spin-off, *POWER RANGERS: THE MOVIE*. She also landed gigs on *KUNG FU: THE LEGEND CONTINUES*, *WALKER TEXAS RANGER*, *SILK STALK-*

INGS, *V.I.P.*, *ALLY McBEAL* and Regé-Corman's *BLACK SCORPION* mini-series. She also tallied stints in movies (*THE MOD SQUAD*, *FAIR GAME*) and was tapped to double for Tammy Lauren on the *MARTIAL LAW* series; but Crawford declined the latter offer, professing an allegiance to *BUFFY*.

I asked Crawford if there were any significant differences between performing in Hollywood and Hong Kong action sagas. "When I started working in Hong Kong, I didn't use pads," she smiles. "I'd just get hit, fall down and get hurt. I was naive at the time and, usually, the stunt guys would put some on me. Now I have my own pads. After a few years with Dai Do, I bought knee pads but it's nothing like the equipment we use here."

"So, usually, I ended up working out with Dai Do or some of the Hong Kong stunt men. We'd usually take focus mitts and the paddle, and practice kicking techniques; we'd pull out the mini tramp, and practice falls on mattresses, because we didn't really have pads. We'd do most of our training in Kowloon Park, doing kicks, punches and reactions. On my own, I pursued formal classes in Chinese broadsword and kung-fu. I'd work out with weights and the rest of the training is on set. It's different with a partner, when you have to remember your marks and be self-conscious of where the camera is. So most professional training is on set. Dai Do was my mentor, so I try to emulate her style but not copy it. Although we'd practice with mattresses, on set the stunt coordinator would say, 'Hit the ground man. Hit the ground!' And you'd do it in order to get their respect. If they can do it, you can do it—it doesn't matter if you are female."

"I remember my toughest fight was against a Korean guy named Choi San. It was hard because I think he was

a chauvinist, he didn't like fighting women and wanted to prove to me he was better than me and that he could beat the shit out of me. I don't remember the film, but it was just me and Dai Do fighting in a junk yard.

"But I had to stick it out. Dai Do always told me that it's hard working in Hong Kong, and that I would always have a hard time. She could relate to what I was going through because she was Japanese and she, too, would feel isolated. So when I'd get upset because people were nasty to me, she'd say, 'Look, if you want to do this, you have just got to stick it out.' Sometimes she was very militant, but sometimes very motherly. She's internally strong—[rights]. I'd love to get her over here and work with her again.

"It's much, much harder to work in Hong Kong than here. First of all, you can spend a couple of weeks, 18 hours a day doing the final fight scene where, in the U.S., it can be wrapped-up in a couple of hours. There's also technical differences. Many coordinators here are being held back because people in charge haven't quite figured out what's cool; they keep falling back to traditional ways of shooting and editing fights.

"Many think it's easy to do a fight but, to make it dynamic for the audience, things just need to be done. *THE MATRIX* was popular, it was new to Americans but to actors who've done Hong Kong films, we've seen it for years. Been there, done that. It's funny; we did the very same wire gags on *POWER RANGERS* but, if you put someone in a bright pink, latex body suit with goofy dialogue, audiences can't perceive that she's performing the same wire gag and action as *THE MATRIX*'s sexy woman in black. We've done it for years. *DARK NEXUS*, my



Yvonne Crawford with her *BUFFY* tools ("This is one of my 'slayer' tools."). Her initial encounter with vampires was a role in Roger Corman's *NIGHT HUNTER* (1963).

sci-fi film in development, will have many wire gags in it. But the terrible thing now is anything after *MATRIX* will be viewed as being an imitation.

"Also, in Hong Kong film, women are always feminine even though they can kick butt, but the gwan lous are always butch and bad looking. Like once, they cut my hair short, dyed it black and made me look dykey. I had muscles but the Chinese girls looked like dolls. They wanted a contrasting look."

The "Hong Kong experience" groomed Crawford, a post-adolescent runaway, into a martial arts celebrity. "I didn't know my mom that well," she admits. "I had a hard time in school in England, got stuffed into five different schools and ended

up leaving school early. My sisters and I—we're paternal triplets—basically took care of ourselves, which is why we're very independent. By the time I was 13 or 14, I felt like I was an adult and couldn't be taught anything. I was wrong. But now, I have a sense of humanity which I acquired by travelling throughout Asia.

"I'm happy I stuck it out over there, because now I'm here and see the style of films they do. Furthermore, I realize what style of film I like doing. I just love action, it has a certain flavor. If I'd never gone to Hong Kong, I might not have had a clear direction in my life and wouldn't know what kind of career I could have had. Living in Asia opened me up to things I never thought I

could experience. I was sometimes treated badly over there, told to go back to England, even got slapped in the street. If I hadn't done all of that, how would that make me different from any other woman doing action in America?"

"I was young in Hong Kong, had no one to protect me and had to survive on my own. Many tried to take advantage of me, so I had to build a force field around myself. I was asked to do those category III films in Hong Kong (i.e. softcore porn), but I loved action and never saw myself as being a sex symbol. My sex side is developing as I am growing up. I'm more conscious of it now. At that time, I didn't care about lipstick and the way I looked. Of course, now, I'm more at ease, confident, grounded and, yes, part of that is being engaged to Jeff. But in Hong Kong, it was a different story. I lived in a tiny 100-square-foot place above a market that was always noisy. I was under a lot of pressure there as I find L.A. to be comparatively tranquil. Being in love has also changed me and I've grown up a bit."

Back on the *BUFFY* set, Crawford prepares for her full body burn. It'll be the first time she's done a pyrotechnical gag. Sitting in a pair of white long johns, she listens to the counsel of stunt men George Fisher and John Casine, who correlate her hand and body posture with a 10-second transformation into a human torch. She's dressed in trousers, sweatshirts and socks that have been soaking overnight in Nomex, a liquid which "freezes" Crawford's body; sweating would combat the gel, thus inflaming her skin. Moments later—shivering so violently you'd think her teeth would crack—she stutters, "It's like slipping into ice cream."

Crawford next slips into a one-piece grass suit, which

conceals the Nomex-soaked clothes. Stunt coordinator Pruitt applies Trias fire gel to Crawford's hands and face, and pours Nomex into her shoes. Clad in a wedding gown, she walks onto the set. Cameras roll, Pruitt ignites the flame and VOOM! Within seconds, Crawford is a literal ball of fire. The wind picks up as the flames rapidly flicker across her face.

"Put her out!" yells Pruitt.

The fire is instantly doused. The set nurse looks at me in tears. There were a couple of risks: the Nomex burned and the flames were too high, but everything is okay. After a thorough shower, Crawford relates that "the stunt men did a great job. I really didn't feel the heat!" The caution and compassion prevailing on the set are completely polarized from Hong Kong's film environment: "I remember doing a film over there called *STORY OF THE GUN*. I had broken my foot on that film, so Dai Do added a scene where she wounded me to explain my limp. Anyway, I had to do this backflip off a boat into the water. So when I went under water, they broke for lunch and everyone took off. When I came up, they left me in the water and nobody pulled me up. I was furious. I had a broken foot and they were all laughing because there was a shark attack just a few days ago. I didn't think it was funny."

Her recent stunt venue includes work on commercials that pitched Sprite via a cluster of black female rappers, all stoned in Asia's finery and practicing kung-fu. But while performing a stunt on *I KNOW WHAT YOU SCREAMED LAST SUMMER*, Crawford ended up in Cedar Sinai Hospital: "I was thrown into a mosh pit and got hit in the face with a video camera. I only needed seven stitches across the top of my eye. I had a good plastic surgeon. I had a similar accident on *BUFFY* over the other eye. I was da-

SOPHIA CRAWFORD

"I back flipped into the water & the crew broke for lunch! I had a broken foot & nobody pulled me up. They laughed, recalling a shark attack a few days ago. I didn't think it was funny."



Crawford: "The message of *BUFFY* is so strong, independent, focused, motivated. Joss Whedon's boarding school experiences are reflected in the show."

ing a high fall. The guy tackled me from behind and I went over an iron railing. With the weight of the person on my back, I smashed my face onto the rail because I couldn't quite push myself off to get over it. It's amazing how much your face bleeds. People look at me wide-eyed and ask, 'Are you okay?' I say, 'I'm fine!' as blood is streaming down my neck and wardrobe. Then I get patched up and go back to work. I have matching scars. I broke a finger on the second season's last episode, and have lots of bruises."

Her histrionic training notwithstanding, Crawford has declined to press *BUFFY* producers for an acting role: "I'm a stunt woman. I double *Buffy* and that's my job on the show." But are the series' fans aware of her film career in Hong Kong? "I think so," shrugs Crawford. "[Series creator/executive producer] Joss Whedon hasn't said anything to me. But my background may be one of the reasons why I got the job. On the first episode I worked on, Joss said to me

the one thing that makes me standout is that I have 'good kinetics.' And I said, 'Thank you, that comes from working in Hong Kong; we are taught to be animated.' What he doesn't know is that I'm acting. I don't think they realize that fighting is also acting."

Buffy's transplantation to a college environment has translated, for Crawford, into "new locations, new buildings to jump off, new fight challenges. We used to do more multi-vampire fight hats, with the ANGEL spin-off, we haven't done as much of that. It would be nice to fight at some other exciting locations because sometimes our stage in Santa Monica can be limiting; the rooms are tiny but we do the best we can."

"It's hectic work. We are still working on getting *DARK NEXUS* off the ground but finding time is tough. At the beginning of the week, we do a lot of day work. By the end of the week, we end up in the graveyard Friday night and work till 4:00 a.m. Saturday.

Then it's back to work at 7:00 a.m. on Monday. What kills you is you get into a night mode, and then get flung back into a day mode over the weekend. It throws you off because your body clock just doesn't know when to enter sleep."

Joh liabilities have included "being buried underground in a graveyard. That was kind of freaky. But with the monsters and stuff, I see the process and know the guys in the prosthetics. But it was a bit unsettling having a pentagram drawn on my stomach for an episode. Then there was the time when I had these real big scorpions put on my stomach. What's funny is when I agreed to do it, I put on a onesie so I wouldn't see them. The animal wrangler dropped one on my stomach then quickly pulled it off saying, 'I can't use this one, it's getting too angry.' And I'm thinking, 'Don't tell me that—do you mind?' So she used a different scorpion. I didn't get bitten. I also had to fight a real bear named Bonkers. He was so cool. He had this party trick where he'd stand up on his hind legs and jump up and down. But when they were shooting it, the bear was looking too cute. We needed to make him look angry. So I had to slash at him with a knife, and he hits me and I go flying off over a sofa. I was a little scared because, with wild animals, it can be out of your control."

A champion for cancer therapy and the environment, Crawford is also an impassioned promoter of the United Stunt Woman's Association, which organizes charitable functions for children. "Stunt people are traditionally stuck in the background," she notes. "Why is it that they're the only people on a set that basically have to say they are *not* there? There are many actors and actresses out there with no training, no interest in action, and yet they appear on shows saying they do their own stunts. It's not fair or correct to take that

credit away from stunt persons, because they are the ones who make an action star an action star. It would be nice to get screen credit or credit for being a star's double. Many feel we're being ousted out. We don't have power and because of this, in many people's eyes, we don't exist. Look at LETHAL WEAPON 4, the stunts were a big factor for that film's success but all the credit goes to the director and stars. When John Woo got an MTV award for FACE/OFF, he dedicated the award to the stunt men on his film. John is one of the few directors to publicly recognize stunt men."

Another eroding component of the profession is a group of extras have been authorized by SAG to take squib hits and small falls on "extra" pay. But Crawford shifts the subject to "spiritualism in the martial arts. I've been shunned by Black Belt magazine because they don't consider me a martial artist. It was my choice not to train for a black belt because I believe that the system is too corrupt, and many people over here are getting a black belt with just six months of training. It's not important to have one.

"The idea of the black

belt is losing its meaning. It's not just about physical aspects; there must be the spiritual, mental and philosophical aspects of the martial art. Teachers talk about being a 'people person' and having teamwork. When you're going for a black belt, that makes you competitive against each other. It's not teamwork when you're trying to kill your partner or beat him up. It's kind of a contradiction. The martial art is a way of life and to train to go out there and beat up someone, or fight and hurt someone in a tournament, seems wrong. I'm not condemning those who have chosen to be fighters, each has their own path; it's just that it isn't my path. I fight in film but I don't hurt anyone on purpose."

So, specifically, what is Sophia Crawford's goal regarding her film career?

"I'd like to do something where I can show my skills, without having to hide my face all the time," she replies.

A gush of wind drifts ashes, from the evening's stunt, through the studio. Crawford brushes her skirt and beams a gorgeous smile that's routinely camouflaged by fire, smoke, flats and non-artificial blood. □

Crawford strikes poses for DIADEMA. **NEEDS:** "I'd only like that the film, currently in pre-production, is very sci-fi flavored. It does have something to do with Russell & Aron 81."





DANA HEE STUNT SUPERSTAR

A BEAUTIFUL BODY DOUBLE'S ODYSSEY: A VAMPIRE, AN ALIEN, "PLAYBOY," AN OLYMPIC MEDAL.

BY LAURA SCHIFF

At first, I didn't believe her. I mean, c'mon, an Olympic gold medalist and cardinal Hollywood stunt woman? With her fair skin, slim build and long, red hair, Dana Hee has the graceful appearance of a ballerina. Surely, this delicate flower is incapable of breaking boards with her fists? And, c'mon, bursting through glass walls amid pyrotechnical pageantry...? Her demeanor is pleasant, almost subdued. She describes her perilous, adrenaline-pumping career with the same nonchalance one would use to rattle off a to-do list of chores.

"I think I was definitely a survivalist," Hee tells me over lunch at Jerry's Famous Deli. She recounts her less-than-ideal childhood in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. "My mom had gone to college for Home Economics. She had been raised her whole life to take care of her man and household. So all of a sudden, after her divorce, she was stuck with three children and no idea of what to do for work."

Hee and her two siblings were placed in the Masonic Home For Children, where the toddlers lived for eight years. Finally, at age 11, the children were released into their mother's custody and moved to California. "My

mom was an alcoholic at the time," recalls Hee, "so we had some family problems." At age 15, Hee ended up living in the streets. "Luckily, that was only for three days, so it wasn't really bad." She bounced from halfway house to government shelter to foster family, until she was finally adopted by a friend's parents. "I was very, very fortunate," says Hee. "A lot of these kids stay in the shelter for years and years, and it's a really rough environment. Then they end up in the streets again. It's a tough life."

Hee admits to lacking self-esteem as a teenager, and I can still see traces of that shyness today. During



Feeling Hee poses for *Playboy*. Not all of her peers, within the shaved community, were impressed with the photo shoot. "Some people feel that they are in a position to censor what another one else does," says Hee. **Hee as Mileena in MORTAL KOMBAT: ANNihilation (97)**



high school, she gravitated to athletics. "I was competing in national competitions and a dream was born," she says. "That dream was to go to the Olympics, and originally that dream was in track and field as a high jumper. But I never fulfilled that dream. As a matter of fact, a year or two after high school, I was training for AAU, which is a national and international competition for track and field. I was really scared of failure. So I ended up calling it quits when I really shouldn't have. I had all the potential and ability to compete, and I just chickened out. I said, 'The hell with it.'"

Timidly bidding adieu to track and field during the early '80s, Hee enrolled in martial arts classes; she practiced a Japanese style known as Shotokan. "Initially, I thought the Bruce Lee movies were so fascinating," she smiles. "That was one of the reasons I got into the martial arts to begin with." By the time she turned 18, Hee was already a black belt. "The more I became involved with martial arts, the more my interest grew in Asian language and culture. I made a point to learn

Hee, as *SPECIES*' 501 (1), struts into the parking lot of Steven Johnson's effects studio (2). "H.R. Giger was the designer of the creature," she recalls. "It was an incredible costume."



something about the Asian languages." Today, Hee is conversant in Korean, Japanese, and Mandarin Chinese, as well as Spanish.

In 1985, Hee switched martial arts modes when she learned that Taekwondo full-contact karate would be introduced as an Olympic event at the 1988 Games in Seoul, Korea. "This was my second chance to realize my dream," says Hee. "I hustled my ass for two years. Basically, I killed myself for this. To make the Olympic team I think is the toughest thing for any athlete. The pressure that you go through, just to make the team, is almost harder than competing at the Olympic games. But once I was on the team and able to compete at Seoul, it was a blast. It was so cool."

There was just one hitch. During the team trials, Hee sustained an injury. "Someone had accidentally kicked my back and injured a muscle," she relates. "Since I had to keep training on it, and didn't have time to rest it, it got worse and worse. We ended up going to Korea two weeks before the competition began and, a week into the training, the back muscle got so bad that I couldn't even throw a kick without being in agony. It brought me to my knees in tears. So my coaches, at that point, wrote me off. My teammates probably wrote me off. They thought that I wouldn't be able to fight."

Hee, however, applied visualization and Zen meditation as therapy. "I imagined myself fighting or doing certain techniques, because that was the only type of training that I could do," she explains. "I did that about a week and a half before the competition, and I gave my back a rest. It was enough to heal the back and let the injury subside so that I wasn't in acute pain for the competition. You have to have speed, timing, power, endurance and strength to win, so to take

"I played Sil, the alien in *SPECIES*; they wanted someone athletic. In *FROM DUSK TILL DAWN*, I'm a vampire flown in on wires—attack actors in the bar scene."



Hee demonstrates Taekwondo. Her training of the martial art earned the title an Olympic gold medal in women's lightweight category.

salt mine in the middle of Lafayette, Louisiana. I got onto the ladder of a helicopter and flew from the tower, then dropped down a short way into a shallow mud pond where there was a big fight that broke out between Kathleen Turner and Fiona. That was one of the more memorable experiences. Being on the ladder so high up was really dangerous because the helicopter blades were blowing the ladder around, and the helicopter could have hit the tower. The fight in the mud lasted a week. Oh, boy, I was really sick of the mud by then."

Returning home after the shoot, Hee was certain she'd never perform stunts again

"because I was married and had a life in the San Francisco Bay area." Fate, however, had other plans: Hee and her husband divorced. "I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my life," she nods.

"I wanted a change, a new direction. So I chose stunts. I moved to L.A. in 1992 and jumped into that. It's a hard time breaking into a new career. In my case, I was very fortunate. With *UNDERCOVER BLUES*, I made great contacts with some of the people who are very well-known and established in the business. So when I came to Los Angeles, I was able to look up some of these people. It's all who you know in this business. The gold medal especially opened doors for me. It automatically says that I'm an athlete, it tells people my history. To be an athlete in this business is very important."

"I got called and asked if I would do the show and double Fiona Shaw, who played the villainess in the film," says Hee. "So I went and did it. To date, it's still the biggest movie I've ever been on, as far as stunts. I had a great time. I was 160 feet up in a tower at a

important, yes. But the business is also perilous and there's no guarantee of a safety net. Sample *THE LONG KISS GOODNIGHT*, (1996) in which Hee doubled for the film's star, Geena Davis. "I actually ended up in the emergency room twice on that film," Hee shrugs. "I ended up

breaking my hand in a really stupid accident. It was during the scene where Geena pulls herself out of the cab of an overturned tanker, then she stands on top of the tanker and then the tanker hits another car and she gets catapulted off that. My accident was in between the set-ups on that one. It was a rainy night, there was a miscommunication, and I ended up falling in between the cab and the truck and breaking my hand. There was also a head injury that I sustained while I was doing a back fall into a coal chute, then slid upside down into a coal bin. As I fell backwards five feet and hit the chute upside down, I landed on my shoulders and my back. The impact was so strong that it snapped my head back. I got a pretty nasty concussion. I've gotten so many concussions now—a lot of them with stunts, some with martial arts—that I actually know when I have them. I just figure, in time, my memory will come back. I am worried about the loss of brain cells which is one of the more detrimental factors of this career. I don't mind the bumps and bruises and the broken bones. I figure the body will heal. But you never get the brain cells back. That's just part of the game."

Hee later found herself in the ER after doubling for Nicole Kidman in *THE PEACEMAKER*. The concluding scene was choreographed for a bomb to detonate on cue as characters played by Kidman and costar George Clooney leap out of a church window. Hee describes the gag as "the scariest moment of my career. We did that scene in Manhattan. They filmed Nicole and George running into the building; they end up in a room with the bomb, the bomb's about to go off and 'Oh my god, what do they do?' The only option is to jump out the window. So they built a facade of the church, and a tiny little

"Nicole Kidman is a sweetheart. Renee Russo is one of the nicest women I have ever worked with. But it can be tough working for actresses; some are just cold."



Shooting a fight between Hee & Russo mess things (stunts) in MORTAL KOMBAT: ANNihilation. "We're in heels, scanty clothes & breaking our asses off."

room behind it. The distance was probably something like 12 feet by 12 feet. They put all the explosives in the room, then they put us stunt people in there—specifically, myself and Brad Martin, who doubled for George Clooney.

"The cameras were rolling, and they yell, 'Hot!' It had been known to happen that once they go hot, the bombs just go off. We took three running steps and busted through the tempered glass of this stained glass window. In order to do that, they rig the glass to be blown by a very, very light explosive, which makes it shatter with a spider web pattern; hence, with its consistency and our timing element, we can punch through it—hopefully—with our bodies. Initially, as we start to break through the window, one bomb goes off. If the glass doesn't shatter, and we hit that window and we fall back inside and the bombs go off, we're literally histo-

ry. The other thing is if one person goes through the window, and the other person trips and does not, then that person's probably going to get caught. So what happened was we both ended up getting cut from the tempered glass. My costume had no sleeves, so I didn't have much protection on my arms. I needed stitches in my finger. Brad Martin had a three-inch gash to the bone in one arm, and a piece of glass imbedded into the bone in the other.

"After punching through the window, we dropped to the ground about five feet and started to roll. As we touched the ground, another huge bomb went off. That second explosive engulfed us completely. We were lost from sight for ten seconds or so. Also, the explosives blew out the entire back wall of the room that we'd been standing in. If something had gone wrong in that one, it would have taken my life. Once we're on

the ground, we're rolling through burning debris. In the process of rolling, the fire gel comes off and I ended up getting some second and third degree burns on my shoulders and elbows. That's why I got paid the big bucks, to take those chances. There's a lot of elements here which are very scary. Sometimes you can come away Scott free, and other times you come away with a few nicks like we did and count your blessings. Getting a few minor burns and stitches is the least of our worries."

Hee notes that BARB WHILE prompted the performance of her "second scariest stunt. I was doubling Pamela Anderson Lee, if you can imagine that! We are two totally different body types! But it's amazing what you can do in film. We're both very thin girls and on-camera it's hard to tell height differences, so they dressed me up and I was able to do a lot of her fight stuff. That was a blast because we did some fight work on a shipping crane 80 feet up in the air. We were on a forklift contraption which had spun her motorcycle into a car. This whole contraption is rotating 360 degrees around. If you were to fall, depending on where we were, it would have been on either concrete or water. That was a very dangerous situation just because you're fighting up there with very thin cables. If you fall off, and the cable wraps around a sharp piece of metal, it's going to break as you fall to your death. There was one sequence where I actually got kicked in the chest and the stomach, and I flip backwards over the top of the car as if I'm going to fall to my death, but I grab an open window of the car. If I had missed grabbing onto the window as I fall, and the cable got wrapped around something sharp and broke, I could have been dead."

She shows me a glossy of herself that was photographed on the set of TER-

MINIMAL VELOCITY, an actioner starring Nastassja Kinski. It's a color shot of Hee jumping off a forklift, seconds away from hitting the bricks face first. "In this scene," she explains, "you have a parachutist who supposedly wants to commit suicide, so she jumps out of the plane and does not pull her chute. Supposedly, she plummets to the ground,—smack!—and bounces. The director decided that they want to see the body hitting the ground. So they put me up in the air on a forklift—maybe seven feet—and I stand up on this crane, launch myself in mid-air face first and fall flat on the ground spread eagle. I think we did that one three times and it aired me out every single time. It's just one of those 'You want me to do what?' things. Even when I have to do stuff where I know it's going to hurt, I'm able to focus on what I have to do without thinking about the consequences. Sometimes you'll do a stunt where you have to fall off a horse down a hill. You do it the first time and it hurts. And then you have to do it again. And again. I think it gets harder and harder to block that pain out, but you have to do that inside your head."

"Dana," I finally blurt out, "what compels you to keep coming back for more self-abuse? Are you a masochist or what?"

"It's challenging to be able to put yourself on the line, to have a little bit of fear there, to have a little bit of risk and to come through it," replies Hee. "I'm definitely not an adrenaline junkie. I don't go out of my way to do this, but I do get a really good sense of satisfaction at being able to do it. And it's fun! I get to travel around and meet people from all over the world and visit these fantastic sites! I was in Jordan last year, galloping horses through the sunrise at an



SPICED. T. Hee as penitent Sif. R: Fitted for the body suit by makeup designer Steve Johnson. "It took me a half hour to 45 minutes to get into it."

ancient temple. It's just incredible, the things that we get to do as a result of the movie business. The work isn't all that glamorous but it pays off."

"Do you generally have good relationships with the actresses you're doubling, or do they resent your presence on the set?" I query.

"It can be really tough working with the actresses," admits Hee. "Some are very warm and friendly. Nicole Kidman's a sweetheart. Renee Russo is one of the nicest women I've ever worked with. But some actresses are just cold. Some would prefer that you just not be there. I remember one show that I spent ducking around corners, avoiding the actress. She didn't like any of the women on the set. I think it's sometimes tough for the actresses to have stunt doubles be-

cause they're the star, they're used to getting the attention, to being admired on the set. And so for another woman to step up in their clothes, their hair, looking like them and then doing something that might garner some appreciation from the crew, it's a very difficult position to be in, I think. They feel, 'Wait a second, that's supposed to be me up there.' Some actresses are used to it, they can handle it. Other actresses really flip out."

"What about the men on the set?" I ask.

"The reaction from the crew in general, and especially the men, is really positive," says Hee. "A lot of the men are probably in love with you just because of what you're doing. They just think it's so cool. A few of them probably think that we're nuts and they proba-

bly imagine that, if their wife or girlfriend were offered the same stunt opportunity, they'd never allow that to happen. But overall, it's an admiration for what you're doing and the willingness to take the bumps, bruises and chances without complaining about it."

But Hee has faced opposition from some on her own home turf. In March of 1993, she posed for *Playboy* and drew the ire of many of her peers. "The stunt community is a very small circle of people," Hee explains. "Some peo-



pie feel that they are in a position to censor what everyone else does. I think it's partly because they're afraid that something that someone else does might affect the industry as a whole. In this case, they were worried that women posing nude in *Playboy* would be a negative reflection on stunt women in general."

"I originally told *Playboy* that, for my own reasons, I would not pose fully nude but that I would do a little mini-skirt sequence for them. This was partly because of the Olympic gold medal. I just wanted to be careful of how I represent myself. But, as it turns out, I was going to do the issue with five other girls who were posing nude. So I got to the photo shoot, and we did the spread with the mini-skirt. At the end of the shoot, I was thinking about

it and I said, 'You know, what's the big deal? This'll be fun.' And so I lifted my skirt and flashed my rear end, and I thought it was one of the funnier things that I've done. And, boy—I tell ya—the shit hit the fan when that magazine came out. I really got trashed by a lot of the women in the industry saying, 'How could you do this?' Even some of the men took offense at the pictures. But more women than men gave me flack for flashing my derriere. People told me I would never work in the business again. Since then, I've come to learn that that phrase is said over and over again when someone gets mad at you, but if you do a good job and people like you, you're going to be hired. It did have somewhat of a detrimental effect that year on me getting hired for stunts. Not enough to hurt me, but enough to make me aware that there are consequences for doing certain things and you do need to be a little careful."

From disadvantaged child to Olympic gold medalist to stunt woman to Playboy model, it's clear that Hae consistently reinvents herself. Facing the new millennium, Hae seems to be poised on the brink of taking another dramatic turn in her life: action film diva? "A few years back, while working with Joel Schumacher on a *BATMAN* movie, my course started changing," she recounts. "He was saying I should be acting. I really started thinking of that new direction. It's really hard for me to get out of the stunt end of it right now because I'm busy with work, and I keep getting calls to do these really fun shows. But I've been doing a lot more acting in the past few years. A lot of them are smaller roles because I haven't actively pursued it—not yet. But I'm continuing to head in that direction and embarking on my new career."

Among the credits on her résumé is *INDEPENDENCE DAY*. Hae played

"I told Playboy I wouldn't pose fully nude. But I shot with girls who posed in the buff, so I lifted my skirt and flashed my rear...And, I'll tell ya, the shit hit the fan."



UNDERCOVER ALLIES: Hae and *World Knockdowns* co-champ, Cheryl Wheeler, convene at the Salt Mine Elevator shop—out of the fans' focus—for a stunt.

several bit parts which required her to be in close proximity to explosives. She broke boards with her feet on a *ROSEANNE* episode, performed a minor role as a vampire in *FROM DUSK TILL DAWN* ("I got flown in on wires, attacking the actors in the bar scene!") and appeared as "a typical woe-is-me hostage" in *LAST MAN STANDING*. In a "typical bitch-slapping scene," which had been choreographed for *STRANGER BY NIGHT*, Hae was "being accosted in the bedroom—thrown around, slapped around—with not much on. A real fun one. All of my parts have been one and two-liners."

One of her better known roles was completely bereft of dialogue. "I played Sili, the alien creature, in *SPIES*," says Hae. "That was really fun. It was my first prosthetic creature job, and the audition for that was really, really tough. They really wanted someone athletic and graceful. Being the

creature was definitely an experience. H.R. Giger was the designer of Sili. It was an incredible costume idea that they had; they made it from silicone and rubber. Wearing one of those things is not my idea of fun. It took me maybe a half hour, or 45 minutes to get into it. It was really difficult to work in because it had a very plasticized element to it; if I were to lift my arms, it would have a rubber band effect of wanting to pull my arms down. It makes your work that much more difficult, but it was interesting. Just being a part of the process, and going to the 'creature effects place' and having a mold made of your head and your body—and having them mold this stuff to your skin, and making you into some weird alien creature—was really cool."

"What's your favorite acting role to date?" I ask.

"Well, I did play Milesa in *MORTAL KOMBAT: ANNIHILATION*," says Hae. "I'm the character that

fights Sonya Blade in a mud pit, using these short metal swords called sai. It was filmed in Wales, in the middle of hurricane weather—freezing cold wind and rain and mud! They had us in heels and scanty clothes. Boy, that was something else. We were freezing our asses out there. We had some of the best martial artists in the world on the show. The actors were so cool, down-to-earth, great to work with."

"For me to be able to do the acting parts with the action is really fun. I haven't really pushed it far, yet. I'm on the verge of still trying to turn down the stunt work and branch off in that direction. I think it's just a matter of time."

Her more recent stunt work includes doubling for Jenna Elfman in *Ron Howard's ED TV*. "I just did what we call 'tickle and tackle' stunts," notes Hae. "It's very small, low-key things. For example, there's a scene where Jenna gets caught in the middle of a mosh pit by a bunch of slam dancers, and Matthew McConaughey comes to her rescue."

Hae also worked a few days on *PRACTICAL MAGIC*, a comedy starring Nicole Kidman and Sandra Bullock as a couple of contemporary sorceresses. "There's a huge scene where the witches are learning to fly, learning their powers," she grins, "and so we were brought in to make sure that the stunts were set up safely, so that the actors could do it without being put in harm's way. We were brought in to test the rigging, to take any chances and iron everything out so they could do their own stunts."

"Then there was another small scene I was able to do with one of the sisters on the show. It had to do with a hanging on a gallows. I had to jump from the gallows with the rope around my neck. You know, it's funny—I really thought it wouldn't be much at all, but once you have a huge two-inch rope

around your neck, it really makes you think twice about jumping off the scaffolding. I don't care how they rig it! It definitely gave me a case of the heebie-jeebies."

Ultimately, Hee insists that she wants to apply her vast athletic experience to helping others. "Ideally, I would love to have an international school of martial arts," she says. "I would love to be able to work with top athletes, but I would also love to be able to work with the community. I'd like to help people like me, people who didn't get the right start in life. And that includes people who have a lot of problems and hang-ups that they need to deal with, and a lot of fears that they need to face. I'd love to be able to work with these people and see if I can help make a difference in their lives, and build their self-esteem."

"You know, in all of those goals that I've set for myself, and all the success that I've had with them, I've fallen over and over and over again and hit the ground. But instead of staying there, I picked myself back up, I brushed myself off and I put myself right back out there. I really think people can achieve their dreams if they just persevere."



3: Hee poses for *Playboy* "I really am surrounded by a lot of women in the [entert] industry." L: Cost as Milena in *MORTAL KOMBAT: ANNIVERSARY*. "We had some of the best martial artists in the world on the show. The actresses were cool."



Alina Thompson

THE SIREN OF PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILLERS, FORMERLY RE-
SISTANT TO NUDITY, YIELDS TO A HOT SPOT IN CYBERSPACE





"Alisa has a fabulous natural presence," says photo-jer Joe DeSantis. "She just needs the proper guidance." (Michigan Stars. Written by Richard of Reness)

PROFILE BY
MARC SHAPIRO



When Alina Thompson started out in this business, she had a definite goal in mind. "I didn't want to do tits and ass films," explains the 26-year-old actress. "I just wanted to do good roles in good films."

Thompson managed to dodge the T&A bullet until 1998. That's when reality set in. "Right now, I'm doing a film that had moderate nudity in it," explains Thompson during a break from filming *KAMA SUTRA*. "I'm going to do some of those kinds of films for the next few months just to have some work going on. I have found that the kinds of movies I was doing early on are few and far between. I love to work so rather than wait for the next role to come along, I'm just going to go for these kinds of films and start working."

Thompson has spent the past decade working in what she describes as "B-plus movies": they were predominantly psychological thrillers and, exempting one or two films, she avoided nudity all together. The actress insists her clothed approach to a B-movie career has been by design. "I've never been put up for nude roles. I haven't done nudity since *PAMELA PRINCIPLE* 2. And, yes, it has resulted in some dry spells, which is why I'm doing the things I don't really want to do just to be working. But I've always got my eyes set on much higher things."

The actress was born and raised in Cerritos, California. The youngest of four children, Thompson recalls, "I was the one who wanted a lot of attention." Hence, the youngster navigated the embryonic stage of her film career. "The idea of acting was one of my earliest memories. I remember being

"I shot Alina at the
Donald Perman
studio in Studio
City," says Jan
Deen. "I wanted a
clean, uncluttered
physical presence
to emphasize her
expressive face."

PHOTOGRAPH BY
JAN DEEN

three years old, and telling my older brothers and sisters that I wanted to be a star. They told me there's just too much competition. I remember saying, 'There can't be too much competition because there's only one me.'

She laughingly recalls her adolescent angst. "Was it a normal childhood? No. It was just as fucked up as everybody else's family is, but I had a happy childhood. High school days were not my glory days. I was tall and skinny, the kind of girl that nobody dated in high school."

But her tutelage at least served the purpose of perpetuating Thompson's appetite for acting. She appeared in a number of high school productions and recalls, "I would get really bad grades in all my classes except drama. In that class, I always got an A."

By age 16, Thompson was chafing at the restraints of formal education. "People go to high school to figure out what they want, but I already knew what I wanted." Hence, when Thompson's older sister, a model, opened the door to the famed Eileen Ford modeling agency in New York, the fledgling actress jumped at the chance. She did a series of magazine modeling jobs in Los Angeles and, shortly thereafter, landed her first overseas modeling job, a four-month tour of the runways in Japan.

"I lied to my agency and told them I was 18," she smiles. "I went by myself, no mother or father. Japan was a real eye-opening experience for me. I was treated like an adult. I would get lonely and scared and want to come home, but I stuck it out. When I finally came home, I couldn't relate to any kids my age."

A year later, Thompson got a two-month modeling gig in Spain. Overseas assignments soon became her specialty and, in the ensuing years, Thompson found herself living and working abroad in Australia, Paris

ALINA THOMPSON

"I had four nude scenes & I was real nervous. In the middle of the final scene, I broke down. I told the director, 'You want to see my tits?' and just shoved my tits into the camera."



Thompson tracks the MARKED MAN (g & r). "I was cast as this bad girl who kills Randa Roddy Pigor for murder. I did a lot of firing guns [8] and driving fast cars. I didn't particularly like the film, I thought it was kind of silly." Milos Ophorus (seen in TARZAN THE APE MAN) co-starred. Marc F. Vassard directed.



and Milan. But by the time she matured into her early 20's, Thompson was beginning to tire of what she considered a shallow career.

"I was getting burned out on modeling," she admits. "I was tired of the fact that my appearance was more important than who I was. I felt I had a lot more to offer than what I looked like. I wanted to do something that was going to make an impression on people."

Thompson's "exotic looks and knockout model's body" encouraged her casting in television commercials for the likes of Budweiser, Reebok, Toyota and Coppertone. She was also making a lot of money. By age 23, Thompson was ready to forfeit modeling and branch into acting.

Her first role was in SLIVER (1993) as one of the neighbors who was being spied upon. "It was two weeks work, a small part but I definitely was not an extra. My impression of Sharon Stone was that she



was really kind of spoiled, and that everybody was catering to her."

Thompson's next role, a guest shot on the syndicated television series RENE-GADE, "was like *deja vu*. In every film I've done, my real life has paralleled the story I was playing. In my RENE-GADE storyline, I had a boyfriend named Joe who was a crazy gangster and he

gave me a black eye. In real life, I had a crazy gangster boyfriend named Joe who had given me a black eye. In fact, I had the makeup man putting the black eye on the eye that had just healed."

While making the transition from model to actress, Thompson tallied more substantive credits; in fact, she considers THE KILLING JAR, a film noir confection, as her initial opportunity to tackle a third-dimensional character. "It was my first audition as a full-time actress, and it was my first creative role. I played the other woman, who was having an affair with my best friend's husband. I end up getting killed by a stalker. I learned a lot on that film, especially what not to do. The other actress on the film was a miserable person who ordered people around. I was real easygoing. I made friends with everyone and didn't let anything go to my head."

Her subsequent role, as a woman with the power over a wayward soul in SEDUCE

ALINA THOMPSON

"I'm working in an arena where I can work everyday if I want to. I don't really have to audition for B-films. I've got a knockout body, I got a great look, I can act. For me, it's just cake."



Thompson played a minor role as Jill the bartender in CUPID (9), a dark thriller starring Ashley Laurence. The actress prefers DEAD COLD (9 & 10), directed by Kurt Anderson, as "the Cadillac of B-films. There was no real acting involved; it was actually driven by a good story." Lysette Anthony was nominated



ME: PAMELA PRINCIPLE 2, proved a traumatic experience for Thompson. "There was a lot of nudity in that film and it was the first time I ever did nudity. I was real nervous. I had four nude scenes, and I managed to get through the first three without any problems, but, in the middle of the final nude scene, I broke down and started crying. I



got up and told the director, 'You want to see my tits?' and just shoved my tits into the camera and said, 'Is this what this is all about?' I was really upset. But then I calmed down and everything was fine."

Her co-starring role in MARKED MAN, opposite wrestler/action icon Randy "The Ram" Savage, was hardly as debilitating as the previous experience. "I played a bad girl who frames Randy for murder. I did a lot of firing guns and driving fast cars. I didn't particularly like the film. I thought it was kind of silly. But I found that even though I don't like watching action movies, I do like doing them. And this one was fun to do."

Thompson was later cast in DEAD COLD, a psychological thriller that she defines as "the Cadillac of B-movies. There was no nudity involved and was a film actually driven by a good story." She was even more content with MAN OF HER DREAMS, which gave her the opportunity to chew a lot of scenery. "I played a white trash woman," recounts the actress. "She gets involved in this crazy relationship, and ends up losing her mind and blowing her head off. It was a real extreme role."

Crossing over to 1997, Thompson was elated with her graduation to meatier roles. "I was really satisfied with the way my career was progressing. I was very realistic in that I knew I couldn't ask for too much right away. I was grateful for the work I was getting."

The smooth ride, however, started to get bumpy. Thompson's "bartender" role in CUPID was limited to only three scenes, "and was basically one of those characters that takes the audience from one scene to the next scene." At this point, she also made her first crack at debuting in a "big" mainstream movie by auditioning for the lead in RUSH HOUR (1998). "Unfortunately they decided to go with a name actress."



"Alina is perfectly proportioned and has a natural body," notes Jan Deana. "She ranges from lyrical to edgy—and has a subtle vocabulary of projection."

The actress continued to avoid "taking the easy way out," rejecting softcore sagas (including *Surrender Cinema's FEMALIEN*) because she branded the obligatory disrotings as "exploitative." However, two years ago—after work had dwindled—Thompson finally succumbed to ruder roles. She approved the part of a "gang banger prostitute" in *PROFESSION*, a *Playboy* film. "I'm reluctant

to talk about it," she says. "But it was 1998 and I was in the middle of a dry spell, and so it was like, 'Okay I'm going to go ahead and do some nudity, but only briefly because I want my career to be on the right track.'"

Thompson is currently participating in a "REAL WORLD meets ED TV" Internet project called *Hollywood Voyeur*. Cameras, fastened within chambers of

her L.A. apartment—including the bedroom and bathroom—document Thompson's every movement in a live action chronicle that's accessible to subscribers.

"I'm in a pretty steady relationship right now with a guy who totally understands what I do," says Thompson. "He's cool with my friendships in the industry and he trusts me. I love that he's really secure with himself,

because the normal rules of a relationship don't apply with an actress."

She also insists that, within a professional capacity, "I have no complaints. I'm working in an arena where I can work everyday if I want to. I don't really have to audition for B-movies. I've got a knockout body. I've got a great look and I can act. For me, it's just cake." □

RENA MERO FIRST WAVE

Some aspiring actors apply to the Pasadena Playhouse for enrollment. But not Rena Mero: she's a graduate of the School of Hard Knocks. Mero was a successful model—striking poses for Pepsi, Guess? Jeans, L'Oréal and other national brands—when she was introduced to wrestling star Marc Mero. Her frequent ringside appearances prompted promoters to hire her as a Ring Girl (i.e. the eye candy who ushered contestants into the ring). Eventually, Mero entered the ring as a contestant. Billed under the pseudonym of Sable, she won the World Wrestling Federation's Woman's Championship, and eventually graduated to the franchise's superstar. But when Mero leaked alleged behind-the-scenes vignettes about the Federation, which turned into the foundation of a lawsuit, she slipped into mainstream celebrity. The green-eyed Amazon's popularity was the catalyst for two publishing records: Mero is the only female to grace the cover of *Playboy* magazine twice in a single year, and was featured on two *TV Guide* covers within a three-month period.

"I enjoyed playing the character of Sable very much," says Mero. "I think it was a wonderful experience. It gave me a huge fan base and following, not to mention the experience of working in front of a live au-

SPLITTING FROM THE WWF, THIS KNOCKOUT TURNS ACTION DIVA.

BY DAN SCAPPEROTTI



It's alluring alien Mero vs. Sebastian Spasse in FIRST WAVE (p. 6). "Temper 107" episode. "It took seven days to film that show, we worked 12-hour days."

dience and being in front of the camera. It was scripted and it was all storylined so it was a great experience. Three years of live TV! As far as I can foresee, I'm finished with wrestling. But never say never. Sometimes life goes full circle and you never know where you're going to end up. Right now, I'm pursuing my acting career and things are going blockbusters for me, and I'm going to concentrate on that."

During her controversial

split from the WWF, Mero was supported by *Playboy* with an eight-page layout in the April, 1999 edition. The publishers were rewarded with the best-selling issue in the company's history. Mero reunited with the magazine for a 14-page spread in the September edition. *Playboy* had actually contacted Mero two years earlier about throwing off the towel. "Back then, it wasn't the right time in my career," explains Mero. "I had too many other things

going on, and I don't think I really established the fan base to have boosted it, back then, to the best selling magazine in history. Once I thought it was the right time in my career, and it might be beneficial to me, I discussed it with everyone who's close to me. I just felt it was a good career move."

Although the blonde bombshell posed for print prior to leaping into the ring, *Playboy* was her initial brush with fleshing the flesh. "I'm very confident in who I am and my sexuality and being a woman," she says, "so I had no problem with nudity. I was a professional model before I got into wrestling, so I had experience in that area; but it was my first time ever for nude modeling. I looked at it as a different form of modeling: an art form. The shoot was very relaxing, and in a professional atmosphere so I had complete creative control over the entire shoot. I chose to have nude shot in a closed studio in Los Angeles."

"To be the first woman in 46 years ever to appear on the cover of *Playboy* twice, in one year, is quite an honor and accomplishment. I have to credit my fans for that. *Playboy* has given me my own magazine, a 100-page collector's edition dedicated to me."

The ex-grappler insists that her bout with histronics wasn't just an impulsive shift to another career. "Acting was always the ca-



"I made a very good decision when I chose to leave wrestling. I'm working on my own TV series, and have about four offers that I'm considering."

reer I wanted to pursue," she smiles. "I was a professional model and I started doing television commercials. Then I got sidetracked and went into wrestling, and I put my modeling and acting careers on hold to do that. Now I'm on the right track, but wrestling was a wonderful experience."

As Sable's popularity climbed, agents solicited casting opportunities for movies. Mero, however, wasn't informed of many of them. "I started receiving offers through the WWF, a lot of which were never brought to my attention," she notes. "There were a few they allowed me to do. I wasn't able to get the time off from wrestling to pursue acting offers, so I had to put that on hold. Now that I have divorced myself from the wrestling world, I'm going full force toward acting."

The producers of the USA network's *PACIFIC BLUE* series persuaded Mero to play a hard-as-

"I enjoyed playing the character of Sable. It gave me a huge fan base. It was scripted, it was all storylined, it was a great experience. Three years of live TV!"



Mero defines her *FIRST WAVE* stint as "a wonderful experience, a great script." Left: As an Egyptian high priestess on *REBIC HUNTER* ("Nine Lives" episode).

nails convict in the "Heat in the Hole" episode. "It was a good experience, and totally different from what I was used to doing," she says. "It was a taped show where you got as many takes as you possibly wanted, or what the director felt was needed for that particular scene. You went on location and were at a different place every day. It was similar in a way to WWF wrestling: you had a script, a character, and lines to

learn. Picking up a script, becoming a new character overnight, and playing her for three days doesn't give you much time to establish the character. I became very familiar with the character of Sable because I played it for three years. I basically created her and she was such a part of me. I was able to develop her and become her in a lot of ways. Being a guest on a series that's already running, you have to dive into it as fast

as you can and just become that character."

Mero's character, Brinda, is an abused wife, sentenced to prison for killing her husband, she butts heads with a corrupt penal institution. "Brinda is a very strong woman," says the actress, "but very hurt. She had a lot of anger and hostility built up inside her. There were a lot of things going on inside the prison. The guards were abusing the prisoners." When a female undercover

officer infiltrates the penitentiary, she and Brinda form an uneasy alliance. "At first we didn't get along at all, then we realized that she was there to help us so we helped her. We cracked the smuggling and abuse ring on the inside by the guards, and cleaned up the operation."

The Sci-Fi Channel launched the second season of *FIRST WAVE* with "Target 117." Cade Foster, an alien fighting fugitive, has made inroads in his battle with the Gua and they intend to do something about it. Enter Lucas, an extraterrestrial femme fatale/killing machine. "I play Lucas, an alien who has taken on human form," says Mero. "Since our planet is dying, our people are looking for a new place to inhabit so we've come to Earth. We're trying to phase out the humans because we don't feel that they are important to us. One of the other aliens, Joshua, disagreed with me and felt that humans did have a place on this Earth. He felt that we couldn't just come in and destroy their world. In the end, they overcome me and kill me."

A "human husk" camouflage is developed for Lucas: her voluptuous physique is suspended by nothing but red straps, reminiscent of the rig constructed for Natasha Henstridge in *SPACES II*. The Gua warrior's fabricated human body is pumped with 50% more alien DNA than other Earth-bound Martians. "That's when I actually became human," Mero says, recounting the scene. "I came to Earth as an essence and I had to be transported into a human form. So I was hooked up to the transporter and they transferred my essence into the human husk form."

The introduction of Lucas into the battle, and her suc-

Page 46 | Entertainment Weekly 5





"Now that I have divorced myself from the wrestling world, I'm going full force toward acting," Mero is playing dual roles in an alien, COPPIEGANGER 224, 21. "In FIRST WAVE, I come to Earth as an essence, transported to human form."



cess or failure against Foster, will determine if the aliens will launch the Second Wave, a full-scale invasion. "We worked 12-hour days, but there is so much down time," grins Mero. "It took seven days to film that show, Monday thru Friday, and then Monday and Tuesday the following week. It is a lot of hard work and long hours, but it is satisfying as well. It was a wonderful experience. Everyone on the set was extremely nice. I got to work with professional people as well as a wonderful director, Jorge Montesi. It was a great script, and everyone was very helpful and willing to make me comfortable."

Mero was subsequently cast in RELIC HUNTER, a syndicated action series starring Tha Carrere. In the "Nine Lives" episode, the ac-

treess plays the officiator of an ancient ritual. In search of Mero to perform as the enigmatic character, the producers contacted a Toronto promoter who knew the actress. Although the script appealed to Mero, she was handicapped with scheduling conflicts. "Because I was so busy, I couldn't fly to Paris, which is where they wanted me to go," she recalls. "So they had to write a script specifically for me. They wrote, designed and assembled my wardrobe in less than a week. They really put forth an effort to make this possible for me. I think it worked out well."

Shooting the episode in Toronto, Mero plays the curator of a museum who drives Sydney Fox (Carrere) into locating a sacred cat statue. "In the beginning, I seem to be a very professional, uptight academic, but there was something not quite right about me. I don't look like a typical museum curator. Later on in the show, you find out that you're absolutely right. Not only am I not a museum curator, I'm an Egyptian high priestess. I need the cat statue to perform a ritual ceremony that will allow the soul of the Pharaoh to be released and ascend to the next level."

When Fox uncovers the ruse, she and the priestess engage in a wild catfight (behind-the-scenes clips of this altercation opened a Sweepstakes segment of *ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT*). Three years of choreographed aggression worked to Mero's advantage but there was, of course, a script to contend with. "You're only allowed to adhere to the story so, whether I was or lost, I have to stick to the script," laughs Mero. "There's not much you can do about that. We did have a good fight scene, though. It was choreographed and in the martial arts form which I'm very familiar with. I do kickboxing and things like that. I think it went very well. We had a good time

"I'm very confident in who I am, and my sexuality, and being a woman: so I had no problem with the nudity. I had full creative control & I chose a closed studio."



"As far as I can forecast in the future, I'm finished with wrestling. But never say never. Sometimes it goes full circle & you never know where you'll end up."

shooting it and it didn't take as long as they anticipated. Tie is very athletic and capable, and so am I, so we were evenly matched."

"It was great, we had a lot of fun together. She has a wonderful sense of humor. She and Christian Anholt, the actor who plays Nigel, were both very accommodating and they made me feel comfortable. They did not kill my character off, so you never can tell what may happen in the future."

Making her big screen debut, Mero plays dual roles in *DOPPELGANGER* 224. "It's the first major motion picture that I've actually starred in," she enthuses. "It's an action thriller with romantic overtones. Doppelganger is a German word that means 'double' or 'echo.' This movie is defi-

nately going to be very fast paced, very suspenseful and exciting." The actress portrays Sarah Johnson, a divorced mother of two whose domestic routine is rerouted into qualifying for a job and supporting her family. "I hook up with a company that is a little out of the ordinary," she winks. "There's a lot of things going on in the company that I'm not aware of. I play two different characters. One is a fierce woman to whom survival and pleasure are everything. Sarah, on the other hand, is smart, loving and vulnerable. It's kind of the good vs. evil thing."

Mero's cyberspace chamber, www.renamero.com, averages no less than 330,000 hits per day. "My website is a place where my fans can go to see things I'm

appearing on, where I will be appearing and there's a store for my merchandise," she says. "It documents just about everything that I've got going on. When I was on the set of *RELIC HUNTER*, I had a photographer with me who took pictures that I posted on my site. I also constructed a day-in-the-life diary. And, finally, I have a workout area that documents my fitness and diet regimen, and things like that. It has a complete photo gallery. It shows you what I've done and what I have coming up. It's a very interactive website, one of the most innovative on the Net."

When I had been originally introduced to Mero, last year, she was "in the middle of cooking Thanksgiving dinner, and I'm concentrating on my pies and cakes. I have 15 people coming over tomorrow for dinner. I cook and bake everything with the help of my daughter. We're actually making an apple pie right now."

A native of Florida who still resides in that state, Mero tries to balance her home life and career. "I try not to be away for long periods of time," she says, "because I do have an 11-year-old daughter and she's getting to the age where it's very hard to talk her into going with us. I try to work it out where I'm only away for a couple of days, and then I come home. I'm trying to establish Florida as a base, but it's becoming more difficult because opportunities keep arising...and all the opportunities are on the west coast."

Mero doesn't regret her decision to abandon the WWF. "Things couldn't be going better," she shrugs. "I made a very good decision when I chose to leave wrestling, and for more than the obvious reasons. It was just at the right time in my career, and I'm also working on my own television series. Right now, I have about four offers that I'm seriously considering." □

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